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CLIENTELISM AND THE COPTS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH AND STATE

by

Derek Brian Barker

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through Political Science  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2006

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the root factors which prevent Egyptian Christians, commonly known as Copts, from successfully participating in the country's mainstream political system. The state of Copts in Egypt warrants significant attention, yet most reports consider their under-represented status to stem from discrimination from the country's majority Muslim community. While that dynamic is present in varying degrees, it does not explain the Coptic Orthodox Church's unwavering support for the ruling party and President Hosni Mubarak. Not only did the Church endorse the President during the recent 2005 elections, it has also carried out censures of secular Coptic activists who push for reform.

This study contends that the failure of Copts to be properly represented in government is not due to simple discrimination, but is linked to the same phenomenon which constrains any pluralism within Egyptian politics. The Coptic Church, instead of pressuring for political reform, has entered into a patron-client relationship with the state. This relationship sees that the President supports policies which are religiously significant for the Church in return for a commitment from the clergy to continually instruct its congregation to support the ruling party. The problem of Coptic political participation is therefore little different than that of any other political group within the Egyptian state. Co-operation with the ruling party politically is necessary in order to carry out activities without constraint. For the Coptic Church, this entails a great deal of autonomy in the conduct of religious affairs in return for granting the ruling party autonomy within the political sphere.

*To my parents,  
For teaching me to dream*

*To Amber,  
For making my dream a reality*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Coptic Orthodox Church has its roots in St. Mark's legendary proselytizing journey to Egypt in the first century A.D. Since then, Egypt has had a turbulent history, with various authorities vying for control of a country which was strategically important both in its location and the resources it contained. After the fall of Byzantine authority in the country in 641 A.D., Egyptian Christians gradually became the minority of the population and faced varying levels of tolerance from different rulers over the centuries.<sup>1</sup> Under the British rule for example, Copts were politically marginalized in an attempt to assure Muslims that the protectorate was not a Christian occupation. Still, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Copts had been allowed to participate as accountants and tax collectors, a role which saw the creation of a wealthy Christian elite.<sup>2</sup> Later, during the pre-revolutionary period, Christian communities organized rallies and conferences dedicated towards increasing their place in the bureaucracy and challenging laws which undermined their rights.<sup>3</sup> Joining with Muslim nationalist groups, the Copts represented an extremely active political force within the Egyptian parliament, especially within the Egyptian *Wafd* party.<sup>4</sup>

Gamal Abdul Nasser's revolution would change every element of Egyptian politics. Undermining the power of Egypt's entire upper class through initiatives like the 1952 re-distribution of land and the nationalizing of foreign business, power shifted

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<sup>1</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, The History of Egypt 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1980), 14.

<sup>2</sup> S.S. Hasan, Copts vs. Muslims in Egypt: A Century's Long Fight for Equality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Otto F.A. Meinardus, Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity (Cairo: The American University of Cairo University Press, 1999), 75.

<sup>4</sup> Hasan, 40.

quickly into a centralized state apparatus.<sup>5</sup> The Christian upper classes were no longer effective in achieving political participation in the new authoritarian structure and in many cases, emigrated from the country. The middle class, much closer to the Coptic clergy, assumed increasing power and helped the Church create an autonomous religious sphere outside the mainstream Egyptian political environment.<sup>6</sup> Much of this renewal of clerical hegemony revolved around new social programs which sought to ensure that Copts became progressively more engaged with the Church.<sup>7</sup>

During the presidency of Anwar Sadat, relations between the Coptic clergy and the ruling party were increasingly strained. Both authorities routinely challenged the other throughout the 1970s, with Sadat accusing the Coptic Patriarch, Shenuda III of trying to set up its own state.<sup>8</sup> Coptic Christians were equally critical, some referring to the President as “Satan’s ally”.<sup>9</sup> In the end, Sadat moved to arrest over 150 members of the clergy, including the Coptic Patriarch himself in an attempt to undermine what he saw as a potential challenge to his system of control.<sup>10</sup>

Upon his release by President Hosni Mubarak however, Pope Shenuda had moved to stress a message of reconciliation with the state.<sup>11</sup> A new position of unqualified support for the ruling party would now accompany a continued and less obstructed commitment to programs of religious revitalization which the Church pursued so controversially before.

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<sup>5</sup> Vatikiotis, 392-393.

<sup>6</sup> Hasan, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>10</sup> Meinardus, 85. The details of the Pope’s imprisonment will be discussed in depth later in this study.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 85.

It is the belief of this study that the transition by Pope Shenuda and the Coptic clergy represented the construction of a clientelist relationship between the Church and state. The ruling party, under President Mubarak, allows the Church to have unparalleled religious authority in return for their political support. The following chapters will detail the dynamics of this relationship, with focus being placed on the system of controls the government uses to restrict political space within Egypt, as well as the environment of vulnerability it maintains to coerce the Church into remaining its client. Moreover, attention will also be placed on the Church itself, and how it maintains control over the Coptic community and secular political groups who seek to challenge the status quo. Finally, this study will examine the specifics of the exchange between the ruling party and the Church, outlining what each provides the other within the system.

Understanding this relationship is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to an understanding of the root causes of political stagnation in the Middle East in general, a topic which has attracted a great deal of scholastic attention. Second, it provides a nuanced and detailed description of Coptic political attitudes and the clientelist environment within the Egyptian state. This is significant, because the welfare of the Coptic Christian community within Egypt is a growing policy concern within the American, Canadian and EU member governments, pressured both by Christian action groups and the Coptic Diaspora. Oversimplification of the relationship between Coptic Christians and the ruling party represents a serious concern, as it may be a foundation for poor policy initiatives. Contributions to this literature are greatly needed to mend a severe deficiency that exists within understandings of the political activities of the Coptic

Church so that more effective steps may be taken to increase Christian participation in Egyptian politics.

### **Reflections on Literature**

The unique nature of a case study can be problematic when determining a relevant body of literature to examine. In many ways, a specific case may be open to influence from a wide range of phenomenon, all of which must be taken into account to fully appreciate its dimensions. That said, the specific nature of a case study may cause only part of a body of literature to be relevant to the topic at hand. Moreover, since this study in particular proposes to build up a knowledge base which is in its infancy, few directly applicable examinations on this specific topic currently exist. Therefore, when dealing with an area that contains a distinct research deficiency, a complimentary examination of multiple streams of research is essential in order to produce a comprehensive fusion of knowledge on a topic. For the purposes of this paper, three streams of literature will be examined, including works dealing with good governance in the Arab region, Islamism and the Coptic Christian Church and community. For each of these topics, multiple themes and approaches exist and will be explored in order to underline many of the theoretical assumptions which will be discussed in the next chapter, as well as factors which affect the relationship between the Coptic Church and state.

#### *Good Governance in the Arab Region*

The root cause of the Arab region's failure to achieve standards of good governance is a source of deep ideological and scholarly divide. For the purposes of

simplicity, the debate will be generalized within this study to two broad groups, described here as the “essentialist” and “structuralist” schools.<sup>12</sup>

The essentialist school, as its name implies, sets out to describe a series of fixed cultural and religious traits which are alleged to be politically significant and inherent to the region. These arguments are based on what Robert K. Kaufman (1974) describes as “cultural irrationality”, which stem from the innate, static characteristics of a society.<sup>13</sup> Despite its controversial premise, the theory remains at the heart of concepts of Middle East “exceptionalism” which continue to be used to explain the failure of democracy to spread into Arab and Muslim countries. In the opinion of most essentialist scholars, Islamic religious and Arabic social values are at the heart of the region’s pervasive inability to achieve standards of good governance. What the West considers to be norms of pluralist political systems therefore will not form organically in this environment.

Perhaps the most famous work expounding this theory is Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996), based on his earlier article of the same name.<sup>14</sup> Here Huntington describes an increasingly intense “historical antagonism” between the Christian West and the Muslim world, discussing relations in the terms of a new Cold War.<sup>15</sup> It is the incompatibility of the values of these two civilizations which will lead to future conflict. Facing off criticisms of Huntington’s thesis, Ronald Ingleheart and Pippa Norris back up the essentialist argument by using the World Values Survey to underline differences in social mentalities (mostly with regard to

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<sup>12</sup> Although the term “structuralist” is commonly used in literature, the term “essentialist” is unique to this study and refers to arguments which state the root cause of underdevelopment is culturally specific.

<sup>13</sup> Robert R. Kaufman, “The Patron-Client Concept and Macro Politics: Prospects and Problems,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 16, No.3 (Jan 1974): 285.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Huntington, 212.

gender and sexual liberalism) between Western and Islamic cultures.<sup>16</sup> Arguing that culture may now override political realities to create conflict, they propose that societal values shape the structures of the Arab region, moving it away from democracy and reform.<sup>17</sup> The impact of cultural realities on politics is also emphasised in Hisham Sharabi's work *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (1988), which links authoritarianism in the Arab politics to the intense patriarchal environment in which it developed.<sup>18</sup> According to Sharabi, these phenomena extend to Islamic traditions as well because they too have been formed around intensely patriarchal norms.<sup>19</sup>

Although the model presented by Sharabi, Huntington and Inglehart-Norris each differ slightly, all come to the same essentialist conclusion. Each view traditional values and norms within Arabic society as the root of clientelism, tyranny and oppression in the region. Political culture therefore becomes an overriding factor which prevents Arab states from moving past patriarchy and authoritarianism.<sup>20</sup>

The structuralist approach explains the systemic failure to achieve good governance in the Arab/Muslim world from a different approach. Instead of focusing on cultural generalities, the structuralist approach outlines specific historical or political factors which maintain the authoritarian status quo. One such theory, clientelism, describes all interactions as a series of rational exchanges between actors, regardless of their culture or religion. The roots of this theory can be traced to studies which began as early as the 1940s and 50s in the field of sociology and anthropology. Within two

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Policy* No. 135 (March/April 2003): 67-74.

<sup>17</sup> Inglehart and Norris, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Sharabi, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Moheb Zaki, *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: Annual Report 2004* (Cairo: Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, 2004), 23.

decades, the ramifications of this theory of interpersonal relations were being redefined and reinterpreted to gauge their impact on relationships between political actors.<sup>21</sup> These initial articles, often found in multi-disciplinary journals, would eventually culminate into major works such as Eisenstadt and Roniger's *Patrons, Clients and Friends* (1984), Roniger and Gunes-Ayata's *Democracy, Clientelism and Civil Society* (1994) and Schmidt's *Friends, Followers and Factions* (1977), the latter being extensively committed to exploring the political ramifications of clientelism.<sup>22</sup>

The nature and definitions of clientelism are for the most part consistent within the literature. Defined by Roniger and Gunes-Ayata (1994) as "asymmetric but mutually beneficial and open-ended transactions...", clientelism has also been described as a "institutionalized general exchange" between political actors.<sup>23</sup> According to Lemarchard and Lagg (1972), an unequal distribution of power is essential, as any equilibrium would cause the system to collapse.<sup>24</sup> Others stress the difference between clientelism and feudalism, arguing that unlike medieval political structures, modern relations between the patron and the client are not overt and formalized.<sup>25</sup> That said, laws can create an informal framework that facilitates transactions between the patron and the

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<sup>21</sup> See Rene Lemarchard and Keith Lagg, "Political Clientelism and Development," *Comparative Politics* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jan 1972): 149-178, Robert R. Kaufman, "The Patron Client Concept and Macro Politics: Prospects and Problems," *Comparative Studies of Society and History* Vol. 16, No. 3 (January 1974): 284-308, S.N. Eisenstadt and Louis Roniger, "Patron-Client Relations as a Mode of Structuring Social Exchange," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan 1980): 42-77, and Sharon Kettering "The Historical Development of Political Clientelism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 18, No. 3. (Winter 1988): 419-447.

<sup>22</sup> Luis Roniger and Ayse Gunes-Ayata, *Democracy, Clientelism and Civil Society* (Boulder Lynne Reinner Publications, 1994), S.N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and Steffen W. Schmidt et al., comps., *Friends Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 3 and Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Lemarchard and Lagg, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Kettering, 420.



subordinate.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the informality of the transaction allows it to be theoretically voluntary, with the subordinate able to abandon their role if they choose.<sup>27</sup>

The formation of a patron-client network also seems to be largely agreed upon, as those with control of resources seek to protect their subordinates from material instability.<sup>28</sup> These resources can appear in several forms, but for the most part, they manifest most commonly as economic or political patronage.<sup>29</sup> These relationships are not inherent to underdeveloped societies, but can advance and transform themselves as politics within a region develop.<sup>30</sup> Bypassing cultural and religious factors, structuralist scholars argue a series of institutional realities put in place historically form an intractable system which restricts the movement of political groups.

The structuralist argument is much more apparent when examining works which deal with specific case studies, unlike the essentialist school which revolves mainly around broad generalized arguments. Instead of discussing the Muslim world as a whole, many structuralist case studies tend to focus on constitutional, legal, political or economic realities within a specific country to induce conclusions which can later be applied regionally.<sup>31</sup>

Several scholars have discussed the Egyptian system from a structuralist standpoint. A key example of this would be an article by Mona Makram-Ebeid (2001), which describes the political structures which impede the creation of a competitive

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<sup>26</sup> Kaufman, 297.

<sup>27</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 3 and Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, "Patron-Client Relations as a Mode of Structuring Social Exchange", 50.

<sup>30</sup> Kettering, 419.

<sup>31</sup> Much of the literature examined here will focus on Egypt as case studies of additional countries are not entirely relevant for the purposes of this paper.

multiparty system within Egypt.<sup>32</sup> These include disrupting opposition parties' organization efforts and even engaging in tactics of sectarian slander to secure victory.<sup>33</sup> With a monopoly on state resources, the ruling party under President Hosni Mubarak is able to control both the country's legislature and media, passing censorship and emergency law restrictions that can be used to frustrate other political parties.<sup>34</sup> Maye Kassem's work *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (2004), outlines political tactics of the ruling party in great detail, demonstrating how the regime created a system where parliamentarians, civil servants and the military have direct political dependence on the executive.<sup>35</sup>

Legal restrictions also represent a major structural factor which bars reform and facilitates the patron-client system. Many of these impediments are found in the executive's ability to manipulate the constitution to support their own purposes. Executive powers in the Egyptian constitution outweigh the powers of the judicial and legislative branches combined, making a centralized authoritarian state a reality which quickly results in clientelist relations.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the executive's control over the ruling party in parliament and its ability to choose judges, undermines efforts to implement reform.<sup>37</sup> These structures, according to the *Arab Human Development Report*, create a

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<sup>32</sup> Mona Makram-Ebeid, "Egypt's 2000 Parliamentary Elections," *Middle East Policy* Vol. VIII, No. 2 (June 2001): 33.

<sup>33</sup> Makram-Ebeid, 33.

<sup>34</sup> Jihad Ouda, Negad al-Borai and Hafez Abu Se'ada, *A Door to the Desert: Egyptian Parliamentary Elections in 2001, Course, Dilemmas and Recommendations for the Future: A Political and Legal Study*, trans. Sohair Sabry (Cairo: United Group, 2001), 35-39.

<sup>35</sup> Maye Kassem, *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 19, 30, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Kassem, 30, 36.

“black-hole state” which freezes any attempt to challenge the regime or bypass the patron-client pyramid.<sup>38</sup>

A great deal of attention has also fallen on the economic structures which bar reform in Arab states. Roger Owen’s monograph, *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2004) places extensive significance on strategic rents (such as foreign aid given to Egypt because of their support during the 1991 Gulf War) which give states economic autonomy from their population.<sup>39</sup> Richards and Waterbury (1996) agree, arguing that social welfare systems used to co-opt citizenry financially into the patron-client system are propped up by economic rent.<sup>40</sup> These funds allow the state to employ a massive workforce, giving the executive tremendous pressure over the economy and raising the negative consequences of citizens who wish to escape the patron-client system.<sup>41</sup>

### *Islamism*

Scholarly attention devoted to Islamist movements is significant in understanding the wider political environment which surrounds Egyptian system. The growth of political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its more radical counterparts has a direct impact on the dynamics of the relationship between the Coptic Church and the Egyptian ruling party. In fact, so important is the role of Islamists on the relationship in question that an entire chapter of this study will be devoted to exploring how it affects the

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<sup>38</sup> Barbara Brewka, Zahir Jamal eds., *Arab Human Rights Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World* (New York, The United Nations Development Programme, 2005), 11.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Owen, *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York Routledge, 2004), 114-116.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996; reprint 1998), 209.

<sup>41</sup> Merih Celasum, *State Owned Enterprises in the Middle East and North Africa: Privatization and Reform* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2001), 65.

Coptic mindset. For that reason, it is essential to examine the growing body of literature surrounding this phenomenon.

As with the discourse on good governance, several different arguments have developed to explain and describe the use of religion as a political ideology. Once again, the literature will be broken down within this study into two generalized branches, those that argue political Islam is a façade masking traditional political ideologies, and those arguing that religious movements genuinely challenge the status quo.

Roger Owen (2004) argues that even the most secular leaders in the Muslim world have attempted to cloak their ideologies in the veil of Islam. Specifically, he focuses on the activities of former Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, who despite his strong socialist leanings, produced an Islamic *fatwa* (religious ruling) supporting all of his major decisions.<sup>42</sup> John L. Esposito (2005) agrees, arguing that Islam has been used to justify every imaginable system of government.<sup>43</sup> Oliver Roy's work, *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994), expands on this idea, claiming the link between Islamist political ideologies and the actual teachings of the religion is extremely problematic, as these movements often consists merely of dated socialist and nationalist ideas recast under a religious banner.<sup>44</sup> Ayn B. Sajoo (2004) and Shireen Hunter (2005) agree, claiming that Islam has been used as a façade to serve several leaders' agendas, especially in strengthening patronage.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Owen, 29.

<sup>43</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988 reprint 2005), 223.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ayn B. Sajoo, ed. *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: IB Tauris, 2004), 57 and Shireen T. Hunter and Huna Malk, eds., *Modernization, Democracy and Islam* (London: Praeger and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 83.

The other main argument contends that Islam is a challenge to the traditional state. Sullivan (1999), gives extensive evidence to describe how pervasive Islamist groups are within the regions' NGOs, universities and youth groups.<sup>46</sup> Wickham (2002), provides exhaustive details on the process of social and institutional Islamification, highlighting the way in which Islamist groups were able to spread throughout Egyptian professional syndicates during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>47</sup> The challenge of Islamists is not always seen as negative within this literature, as many scholars, such as Ebrahim Mossa, have given attention to ways in which these activists are attempting to harmonize their values with existing international norms such as the United Nations Charter of Human Rights.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Coptic Christians*

Literature on the Coptic Christian Church in Egypt differs slightly when compared to works which focused on clientelism and Islamism, primarily because of the focus being on individuals or groups rather than a theory or ideology. Still, while there may have been few contradicting arguments, there were three principle methods of approaching discussions of the Coptic Christians. These approaches will be classified as the Islamist approach, the historical approach, and the political approach.

The Islamist approach to discussing the Coptic Christian community typically comes from Muslim scholars who place emphasis on primary sources of authority within Islam, such as the *Qur'an*, as well as the actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his

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<sup>46</sup> Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 1, 29, 55.

<sup>47</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 178-185.

<sup>48</sup> Ebrahim Mossa, "The Dilemma of Islamic Human Rights," *The Journal of Law and Religion* Vol. 15, No. 1/2 (2000-2001): 195.

closest companions. Within this framework, called the *sunnah* by Muslims, a theoretical body of knowledge exists to instruct Muslims on how to conduct relations with religious minorities. These constructs are therefore being closely examined by Islamists intent on creating modern and practical solutions within a religiously acceptable framework. A. Rahmam I. Doi's study *Non-Muslims under Shari'ah* (1979) has examined the approaches early Muslims took towards Christians with great detail, stressing the positive nature of encounters for both sides.<sup>49</sup> Using many of the authoritative Islamic examples discussed above, other prominent Islamist scholars such as Abdul a'la Mawdudi (1961) have also contributed to this approach, outlining a framework for dealing with non-Muslims in a theoretical Islamic state.<sup>50</sup> Both discuss rights and responsibilities of non-Muslims under Islamic law, while defending the freedom they would enjoy as a protected minority.<sup>51</sup> Other works, such as Sohirin Mohammad Solihin's *Copts and Muslims in Egypt: A Study in Harmony and Hostility* (1991) are in response to particular political events in the relationship between Christians and Islamists in Egypt. Solihin recounts many of the same rights Islamic law gives to Christians that Doi and Mawdudi describe, but criticizes Copts for standing against attempts to codify Islamic law into the Egyptian criminal system.<sup>52</sup>

More traditional academic literature on the Coptic Christian Church is also divided. Many studies focus intensely on providing historical narratives of the Coptic

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<sup>49</sup> A. Rahman I. Doi, *Non-Muslims under Shari'ah [Islamic Law]* (Brentwood: International Graphics, 1979), 76.

<sup>50</sup> Abdul a'la Mawdudi, *The Rights of Non-Muslims in the Islamic State*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1961), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Mawdudi, 10, Doi, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt: A Study in Harmony and Hostility* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1991), 74-77.

community's history as well as the various theological beliefs that the clergy expounds.<sup>53</sup> Other studies, such as John H. Watson's *Among the Copts*, have focused largely on historical movements within the clergy, a dynamic not easily observed.<sup>54</sup> Given the proximity of Copts and other Christian groups to the Islamic world, several studies, such as Margret J. Wyszomirski's *Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies* (1975) focus their attention on the realities of sectarian strife that have appeared throughout the centuries between Muslims and Christians.<sup>55</sup>

Examining the political activity of Copts in Egypt is largely considered a taboo activity, a stigma which has resulted in a severe deficit in scholarly literature. Since the revolution, only a few attempts have been made to examine the political inactivity of the Coptic Christians. B.L. Carter (1986) and Edward Wakin (1963) were two of the first Western scholars to deal directly with the role of Coptic Christians in Egyptian politics, outlining the rise of Copts in parliament before 1952 and the various discriminatory realities which prevented the community from engaging politically under Nasser.<sup>56</sup> More recent examinations have focused on the role of the Coptic Church, as the clergy's place in politics has expanded greatly under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, at the expense of secular Coptic movements.<sup>57</sup> The most comprehensive text on the Coptic political activities is S.S. Hasan's *Copts vs. Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Centuries Long*

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<sup>53</sup> See Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 1991), Robert Brenton Betts *Christians in the Arab East* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), and Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> John H. Watson, *Among the Copts* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2000; reprint, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Margret J. Wyszomirski, "Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies," *World Politics* Vol. 27, No. 3 (April 1975): 430-455.

<sup>56</sup> B.L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) and Edward Wakin, *A Lonely Minority: The Modern Story of Egypt's Copts* (William Morrow, 1963; reprint, Lincoln: iUniverse.com, Inc., 2000), ix.

<sup>57</sup> See Nelly Van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt, eds., *Between the Desert and the City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1997) and Maya Shatzmiller ed., *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

*Struggle for Coptic Equality* (2003). Hasan's focus on Church activities, theology, and the clerical monopolization of the Coptic political space demonstrates many of the critical foundations for the Coptic community's lack of political participation.<sup>58</sup>

The existing literature is problematic in several ways. First, studies on the political activities of the Coptic Christian community are in their infancy. Examinations for the most part have been sporadic and are now often dated. Popular conceptions of the relationship between the Copts and the ruling party is also inaccurate, describing the relationship as a simple unidirectional model, with the Coptic Church represented as a victim of state discrimination. This however, does little to explain the significant warming of relations between the clergy and the executive branch that has occurred under the Presidency of Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, it does not reflect evidence collected by this study which suggests a reciprocal yet asymmetrical relationship between the Church and state. This study hopes to contribute an alternative understanding of Coptic political realities in Egypt by linking it to the broader failure for democratic reform in the region.

### **Methodology**

The evidence within this research will primarily be qualitative, as political norms are difficult to assess empirically without significant polling. Polling in the developing world represents a serious challenge which cannot easily be overcome. Language barriers and financial demands present a challenge that is simply not surmountable at this level.<sup>59</sup> Alternative polling strategies, such as email or telephone polling is also not feasible because of the minimal technological capacity of Egyptians who reside outside

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<sup>58</sup> S.S. Hasan. *Copts vs. Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Centuries Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> Several studies, such as those by Mark Tessler, have attempted to carry out polling in the Middle East and North Africa. Despite these important contributions, the region remains more difficult to quantitatively examine than other areas within the developed world.



of major urban centres. Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, permission from the Egyptian Government to engage in such research is unlikely, and participation would be difficult to secure. Those who do participate in polling may not understand the questions being asked (due to lack of education), may face serious repercussions for their answers (raising significant ethical concerns) or may have been coerced to provide responses that are misleading.

### *Textual Research*

That said, there is a wealth of writings on good governance and Islamism in Egypt and the Arab region. These studies are significantly helpful when attempting to describe the political environment that Coptic Christians belong within. Moreover, within this study, several unpublished reports were collected with the help of the various human rights groups in Cairo. These reports, discussing legal, constitutional and sectarian issues, were extremely helpful in forming a situational understanding. Moreover, reports on specific events, such as the recent violence in Alexandria during the autumn of 2005, were extremely detailed and constructive to the research process.

Qualitative evidence on Egyptian religious norms is available in the theology and religious teachings of both the Egyptian Orthodox Church and Islamic scholars. This includes doctrines on how Islam is to deal with religious minorities (commonly termed *dhimmis*) and Orthodox Christian ascetic values which stress a retreat from civilization, both themes that will be stressed in this study. An examination of these (and other) doctrines through religious text and scholarly writings will provide a strong base for gauging the religious norms of these two traditions, helping to illustrate what impact these have on the relationship in question.

### *Interview Structure and Participants*

Research into Egyptian religious norms and the patron-client system in Egypt was carried out through unstructured interviews with a variety of experts within the Egyptian political system. The choice to not structure the interviews was deliberate, as the sensitive nature of this topic often requires similar questions to be asked differently to experts from different ideological/religious backgrounds. Interviews were held with representatives from human rights groups, Coptic journalists, Egyptian legal experts, and Islamist in order to gain a wide perspective of how the issue of Coptic political participation was conceptualized. This was significant due to time constraints which did not allow for repeated extensive interviews. Therefore, interviews presented in this paper will represent a broad thematic discourse from a variety of significant perspectives, rather than a focused and detailed presentation of one.

Due to the financial and time constraints which faced this thesis, as well as the previously mentioned factors which frustrate quantitative research in Egypt, a significant amount of emphasis is placed on expert interviews as a source of evidence. Although this process was extremely beneficial, this study in no way alleges it can clearly and comprehensively demonstrate in empirical terms that the dynamics of the Coptic-state relationship are as the qualitative evidence describes. That said, this study hopes to succeed in outlining an alternative perspective with which to understand Coptic political realities.

### *Interview Questions*

The questions themselves were thematically consistent and discussed several key points, including, the Church's relationship with the executive, whether President

Mubarak has improved Coptic human rights within Egypt, the positive and negative impact of the clergy's monopoly of the Christian community's political discourse, and the impact of Coptic theology on political participation. Other questions involved gauging the impact of Islamist groups on sectarian tensions, whether the executive manipulates religious sentiments to maintain control, and the role of the Coptic diaspora on Muslim-Christian relations within Egypt. Secondary questions were also raised and were typically particular to each expert. This was to take advantage of unique personal or professional insight that each had for the topic. Once again, a broad range of questions were asked in order to take advantage of limited access to those being interviewed. In depth examinations of each topic would have required several extensive meetings which were not possible to secure. Since expediency was paramount, effort went to establishing a consistent foundation with which to draw out overlapping themes.

#### *Additional Resources*

Significant material was collected from conferences that revolved around the problem of religious freedom in Egypt. Unlike the interviews, these conferences would be held in Arabic rather than English, presenting a significant linguistic barrier. In order to overcome this conference sessions would be recorded in Arabic with the permission of the discussion groups' organizers. Translators were obtained to simultaneously relay the discussion in English for recording in written notes. Additional primary material was made available during these conferences, including NGO reports on sectarian violence (the reports had been previously translated into English).

### *Ethics*

Ethical considerations were therefore fairly minimal. First, interviews rarely raised confidential information, as questions were directed to draw out the expert's knowledge of their field. Each person interviewed was extensively educated, and therefore demonstrated a strong intellectual capacity to understand what was being asked of them. Before each interview commenced, permission was secured to use answers in scholarly publications, including this thesis. Each was made aware of any recording devices and was given the option of asking for the recording to pause in order to relay confidential information.

Every attempt to maintain strict ethical standards was pursued because of the potential harm which could come when discussing sensitive information in political environment such as Egypt. Despite the nature of the people interviewed, their answers can be politically damaging if misused, and all efforts have been taken to ensure that notes and recordings remained secure while in Egypt.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to describe the constraints facing Coptic political participation in Egypt, it is necessary to link them to the greater political realities in the region. Whereas most studies have linked Coptic political inactivity to the intolerance of a primarily Muslim society, it is the opinion of this study that it is linked to the very same phenomenon that suppresses any sort of pluralism in the region. If the environment was simply one of intolerance and persecution, one would expect to see the Coptic Church take an antagonistic stance to the system,<sup>60</sup> pushing for greater political participation in order to combat discrimination. Instead, the Church encourages its members to actively support the secular ruling party and censures Copts who are critical of the executive authority.<sup>61</sup> This tendency towards internal censorship does not exist with regards to Islamic extremism, as the Church has often been critical of sectarian violence.<sup>62</sup> What therefore, is the nature and roots of this system of control? The following chapter will attempt to answer this by focusing on theories that outline possible structural constraints to what has been termed as 'good governance' in the Arab region. This process will attempt to ascertain which theory is the most accurate when describing failures of political pluralism in general and particularly within the relationship between Copts and the Egyptian state.

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<sup>60</sup> As it did under the Presidency of Anwar Sadat, a period which will be examined in detail later in this study.

<sup>61</sup> This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>62</sup> The relationship between the Church and Islamic extremism will be explored in Chapter 4.

It is widely accepted that political movement within the Arab region is greatly constrained.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the foundation of this system of control must be weighed as several paradigms have been developed to describe the political realities of Arab states.

For some time, attention has been given to why the Arab region has failed to develop principles of 'good governance'. Before continuing, it is important to acknowledge that the notion of what good governance itself represents is problematic. That said this study will seek to avoid prolonged discussion over what Thomas Wiess describes as a term which outlines ideas of global problem solving at all levels.<sup>64</sup> At the same time however, it will accept that political and economic reforms in the Arab region have, generally speaking, fallen behind most other regions in the world. Moreover, it will be assumed that the ability to carry out changes is curtailed primarily by internal phenomenon.

Explanations over the resiliency of Arabic regimes to resist change have largely treated this region as exceptional to world norms. As mentioned in Chapter One, essentialist arguments bypass longstanding historical and political realities in order to focus a great deal of emphasis on arguments which suggest the region is religiously or culturally incompatible with 'good governance' principles. These conclusions will be deconstructed in the following section in order to critically analyze whether Islamic or Arabic social norms represent a mindset which keeps the political status quo of Arab regimes intact.

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<sup>63</sup> Attention will be given in detail to this in Chapter 3, where discussion of the roots of Egyptian state power will be outlined.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas G. Wiess, "Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance; Conceptual and Actual Changes," Third World Quarterly Vol. 21, No. 5 (2000): 796.

## *Islam and Good Governance*

As described above, the religion of Islam is regularly associated with the failure of the Arab Region to adopt ideas of good governance. The first step in examining this claim is selecting a definition for the term 'religion'. Sociologists such as E.B. Taylor have described religion as a person's relationship with a supernatural being. For Émile Durkheim, religion was a term which outlined one's response to the "sacred".<sup>65</sup> For the purposes of this study however, the definition for religion will, perhaps arrogantly, diverge from the opinion these great scholars, as interest here lies in the teachings of the religion itself and not its sociological elements. Therefore, religion will be defined wholly as a "theological ideal" which can be best understood by examining a particular faith's fundamental teachings.

A polemic against the essentialists would be tangential, as only a concise overview of the key arguments is necessary to show that links between good governance failures and Islam are problematic.<sup>66</sup> One of the earliest essentialist arguments is found in the German sociologist Max Weber's classic work on religion and modernity, which described Islam as completely devoid of "rational thinking" and represented an ideology which could never be compatible with a progressive state.<sup>67</sup> More modern scholars, like Bernard Lewis, maintain that Islam represents a system which failed to absorb Western innovations and steadily closed its doors to ideas of modernity.<sup>68</sup> While Weber's study can be seen in light of the historical period in which he was writing, Lewis' modern

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<sup>65</sup> Vicky Randall and Robin Theobald eds., Political Change and Underdevelopment: A Critical Introduction to Third World Politics, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 61.

<sup>66</sup> Such a study has already largely been compiled in Edward Said's Orientalism (New York: Random House, 1978).

<sup>67</sup> Hunter and Malik, 11.

<sup>68</sup> See Bernard Lewis, What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East (New York: Perennial, 2002).

explanations lack any evidence that Islam is theologically detrimental to progress. He instead largely limits himself to describing the fall of the Islamic world from its place of cultural predominance rather than explaining why this occurred.

Many arguments do however go further and examine particular interpretations of Islamic theology, emphasising parts which seem to support the idea of authoritarian rule. For instance, many scholars draw a correlation between the Islamic idea of a sovereign and absolute God and the prevalence of non-democratic states in the Middle East. This religious belief, it is claimed, gives Arab authoritarian states a strong ideological foundation.<sup>69</sup>

Drawing correlations between Islam and politics is, in reality, much more difficult than scholars often suggest. Islam itself is hardly a monolithic entity, and has been used by both governments and opposition groups as a way to build legitimacy for their policies.<sup>70</sup> In fact, according to John L. Esposito,

The many interpretations and uses of Islam by governments, movements, and individuals have produced a diversity of ideologies, actors, organizations and programs. Islam in recent years has been used to legitimize monarchies (Morocco and Saudi Arabia), military regimes (Pakistan, Libya, the Sudan) and a theocracy (Iran). Self-styled Islamic regimes have spanned the political spectrum, from radical socialism in Libya, to the conservative Saudi monarchy.<sup>71</sup>

Clearly Islam, a religion of 1.2 billion people spanning countless cultures and ethnicities is too diverse to have broad and superficial conclusions prove accurate. In fact; Oliver Roy has argued that the Muslim world can be divided into no less than four

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<sup>69</sup> Shrabi, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Esposito, The Straight Path of Islam, 159.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 223.



unique spheres, including Indo-Sunni, Arab-Sunni, Turkish Sunni and Persian-Shi'ite.<sup>72</sup> In reality, even these classifications encompass an enormous diversity of traditions. Furthermore, the link between Islamist political ideology and the actual teachings of the religion is problematic, as Roy successfully argues these movements that often consist merely of dated socialist and nationalist ideas that are recast under a religious banner.<sup>73</sup>

Given the broad nature of Islam, the only accurate way of gauging the religion's opinion on governance is to avoid a focus on the historical actions of Muslim leaders, but to concentrate on the teachings of Islam's key sources of authority. For the overwhelming majority of Muslims, the fundamental sources of authority are textual, and include the *Qur'an* (believed by Muslims to be the literal word of God spoken through the Prophet Muhammad), the *Hadith* (representing collected accounts of the Prophet's own sayings and actions as reported by his closest companions) and the *sunnah* (the practical example of the Prophet Muhammad). The *Qur'an* speaks of governance indirectly, and, despite the claims of Islamic political movements, holds few specifics for describing the ideal political system. That said, it does instruct believers to conduct "their affairs by mutual consultation".<sup>74</sup> This notion appears again in the *Qur'an*, when Muhammad is told by God to "consult them [members of the community] in affairs (of the moment)".<sup>75</sup> According to the *tafsir*, or *Qur'anic* commentary of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, these passages refer to the concept of *shura* or consultation, an Arabic social construct which will be examined in the coming paragraphs.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Roy, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Qur'an* 42:38.

<sup>75</sup> *Qur'an* 3:159

<sup>76</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1999), 1257.

The *hadith* also make mention of the notion of responsible governance and the importance of confronting tyranny. Ibn Umar reported that Muhammad once said “every one of you is a ruler and every one of you shall be responsible for those you rule...” (Bukhari 11:11)<sup>77</sup> Ali also makes mention of the following Prophetic statement: “obedience is due only in that which is good.” (Bukhari 64:61).<sup>78</sup> Other *hadith* (found in Tirmidhi 17) states, “the most excellent jihad is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler”.<sup>79</sup>

Although the above sayings are considered parts of the Prophet’s *sunnah*, more evidence of Islam’s insistence on consultation can be derived from the biography of Muhammad. In the lead up to the first major engagement between the Muslim community and Mecca’s pagan tribes, Muhammad consistently consulted with his army on every major development. As his force made preparations around the wells of Badr, one of Muhammad’s followers, Al Hubab ibn al Mundhir ibn al Jamuh, made the following critic:

O Prophet of God, is this spot where you have dismounted a place to which God has guided you and, therefore, may we neither step beyond it nor stay far behind it? Or is this simply a question of ordinary war strategy, of measures and moves and counter measures and moves?<sup>80</sup>

When Muhammad answered it was the latter, Al Hubab suggested a new position which would cut off pagan army from the well’s water. Afterwards, Muhammad “sent a reminder to all his companions that he is but a man like them, that all decisions have to

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<sup>77</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ali, A Manual of Hadith (Dublin: The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore USA Inc., 1941; reprint, 2001), 328.

<sup>78</sup> Ali, 331.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>80</sup> Muhammad Husayn Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. Isma’il Ragi A. Al Faruqi (American Trust Publications, 1976), 217-224.

be taken by all of them in consultation with one another, that he will not decide anything without them finally, and that he stands in great need of their good counsel.”<sup>81</sup> Although this situation underlines God’s unquestionable authority in Islam, consultation is clearly stipulated amongst decisions made by human leadership, even that of Muhammad himself. It is therefore hard to justify the core teachings of Islam as encouraging anything but an open and participatory system of governance, even if that has not been adhered to by Muslim rulers in practice.

Many Islamic scholars, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kurd, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, wrote extensively on Islam and the state, and argued that the religion rejects ideas of corruption and despotism and promotes the belief that “the just state, in which men fulfill themselves, is that in which the individual is free and freely serves the community, and in which the government watches over this freedom but is itself controlled by the people; this is what the true Islamic state was”.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, according to an Islamists interviewed by Kevin Dwyer, the theology of Islam would in fact, greatly challenge the authority of the state.

As man is the representative of God on earth, there is an equality between the governed and the governor. Islam gives no more weight to the views of the governor to those of the governed. This is of great importance and has three correlates. First, Islam does not provide a foundation for the state. Of course there is a tie between religion and politics, but our basic texts do not call for the state. That is why I believe that the Islamic state must be basically a non-state society, where civil society must attain real power in order not to be absorbed by the state. Second whatever state we have, it must not be very strong, it must only be strong in essential but limited domains...human freedom is

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<sup>81</sup> Haykal, 217-224.

<sup>82</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London: Oxford University Press 1962; reprint, New York: Cambridge University Press 2004), 272.

essential to Islam, because only with such freedom will dispute and struggle possibly lead us to the best answers.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of Islam weakening state authoritarianism is also shared by Oliver Roy, who argues that totalitarianism seems to only rise in the Muslim world when society is in shambles.<sup>84</sup> Arguments that place Islam at the root of the Arab region's failure to develop regimes of good governance have not taken into account the fairly clear demands for democratic and transparent governance which exist in the religion's fundamental sources. At a practical level, Islamic teachings, admittedly, have been used in condemnation of Western notions of good governance. In the light of the above discussion however, it seems, in fact, it is more likely that Islamic teachings are not the cause of authoritarian ideologies, but are themselves often manipulated to grant legitimacy to regimes in order to turn popular opinion against reform.

#### *Arabic Cultural Norms and Good Governance*

The concept of a cultural incompatibility that exists between the Arab region and the principles of political reform is also extremely widespread and repeatedly based on tenuous correlations and generalizations. One example of this is the repeated critical examinations of early childhood education which is argued to be the root cause of stagnated political cultures in the Arab Region. An example of this can be found in the *2003 Arab Human Development Report*, which states most Arab children are exposed to an authoritarian/overprotective style of child rearing, a philosophy which results in weak decision making skills and passivity.<sup>85</sup> Sociological evidence often leads to correlations

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<sup>83</sup> Kevin Dwyer, *Arab Voices: The Human Rights Debate in the Middle East* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 216.

<sup>84</sup> Roy, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Kristen Helmore and Zahir Jamal, eds., *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Based Society* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2003), 51.

between the childhood acceptance of the father's dominance over the domestic household and the later acceptance of an authoritarian state's control over the public sphere.<sup>86</sup> In essence, these arguments claim the socialization of Arab children creates a future adult mentality in which the legitimacy of a staunchly vertical power structure is unquestioned.

Sociological evidence of Arab culture can, however, demonstrate strong foundations for good governance principles. While discussing the textual sources for authority within Islam, several references were made to the practice of *shura* or consultation, an Arabic tribal construct which will now be explored in detail. The traditional Arab authority structure was not as vertically entrenched as often suggested. Although staunchly patriarchal vertical units did exist, with *bay'ah* (homage) regularly given to the *sayyid* (tribal chief), he did not have unlimited powers of authority. His position would more accurately be described as a "first among equals" within his sphere of influence, as other positions of authority, such as the *hakam* (wise man or tribal elders) were often highly regarded.<sup>87</sup> Within nomadic tribes, the tribal chief, called the *Shaykh al-Qabilah* was elected based on what the community judged to be outstanding characteristics such as bravery, generosity, modesty, eloquence, patience and clemency.<sup>88</sup> There was therefore no divine or mystical rationale on which his position was founded. Moreover, the *sayyid* did not make decisions independently, but through majority-rules decisions of a tribal council which included family chiefs, soothsayers, poets and other individuals judged to have outstanding leadership character.<sup>89</sup> Many tribes gave every

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<sup>86</sup> Shrabi, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Hamid Dabasi, Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads (London: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 83, 91-92.

<sup>88</sup> Mishal Fahm al Sulami, The West and Islam: Liberal Democracy vs. the System of Shura (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 37-38.

<sup>89</sup> Al Sulami, 38.

person the right to speak so that transparency would allow inter-communal trust to remain firm.<sup>90</sup> Even after decisions were made, there was no executive authority to enforce the decisions. Tribal authorities could only boycott and isolate those who refused to obey their rulings.<sup>91</sup>

Settled communities, such as the trading centre Mecca, were also ruled by a tribal council, which discussed wars, the annual pilgrimage (which pre-dates Islam) and civil matters such as marriage and divorce. Other Arabian settlements, such as Saba (Sheba), were monarchies, but with a rule that was far from absolute. In fact, decisions made by the King of Saba needed to be approved by a *Majlis al-Shura* (consolation council) in order to be enacted.<sup>92</sup>

Socially, according to W. Montgomery Watt, each mature male felt equal in standing to the *sayyid*. The tribal chief, although in a position of esteem, could only persuade his kinsman, not command them.<sup>93</sup> Even in times of war and crisis, when emergency authority was granted to the *sayyid*, a time limit would often be stipulated to keep power from being centralized.<sup>94</sup>

Still, many critical sociological observations do indeed represent genuine cultural constructs in the Arab region. Despite this however, it is unlikely that these are responsible for political stagnation. The presence of patriarchal norms is in no way exceptional to Arab culture and society and cultures with similar mentalities have succeeded in establishing stable liberal democratic traditions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>93</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, Islamic Political Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 40.

<sup>94</sup> Watt, 40.

Century.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, in order to illustrate Arab exceptionalism towards good governance, evidence would have to clearly demonstrate that such ideas were completely alien to political discourse in Arabic cultures. This is clearly not the case, as historical evidence shows that Arab society has repeatedly questioned the nature of government, using language that strongly mirrors contemporary writing. Once again, a thorough overview of the literature would be tangential, and the following examples are meant only to demonstrate that such a discourse was ongoing. One key example would be the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century newspaper *al-Jinan*, founded by Butrus al-Bustani in 1870. In one edition, *al-Jinan* describes the East as “once prosperous and civilized” but had now fallen into a downward spiral of “bad government”. According to Bustani, the only remedy was a regime of “good government” based on the principles of patriotism, education, division of powers, an independent judiciary and separation of religion from state.<sup>96</sup> Other scholars, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century al-Afghani, argued tirelessly against those who believed Arabic culture and religion were not compatible with modern technology and political reforms.<sup>97</sup>

The 2003 *Freedom Survey* in its attempts to gauge political values of different cultures is further evidence against the idea of cultural exceptionalism. Results in the Arab Region were strongly in favour of democratic reforms, with over seventy-five percent of respondents listing greater political freedoms as an issue of primary concern.<sup>98</sup> In fact, detailed questions on the survey gauged the Arab perception of various attributes which make up a regime of good governance, finding little distinction between the values

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<sup>95</sup> An excellent example would be Japan, whose rigidly authoritarian society has maintained both democracy and a highly competitive capitalist economy for over sixty years.

<sup>96</sup> Hourani, 263.

<sup>97</sup> Hourani, 272.

<sup>98</sup> Brewka and Jamal, 97.

of the Arab Region and other developing states. Patriarchal values may therefore have a very strong place in Arabic society, but these values seem to hold little significant in the Arab mind to questions of politics and good governance.

The above only discusses values of Arab society, and does not discount the possibility that patriarchal relationships are at the core of Arab failure to achieve political reform. In fact, evidence is extremely strong to suggest that a system of exchange and constraint exist within most Arab states which maintain the elite's power base.<sup>99</sup> Patriarchal relationships however, relate only to exchanges made between those sharing a primordial link, such as those that exist between kinsmen.<sup>100</sup> For much of the Arab region, especially republics such as Syria and Egypt, this is not necessarily the case. Evidence suggests a system which is much more pervasive, tying diverse groups together within the state's authoritative mechanisms. This is clearly the case within Egypt, whose regime must maintain controls over a diverse ethnic and religious population. This ability to cross primordial barriers calls into question the power of patriarchy and would instead suggest an entrenched patron-client relationship of control.<sup>101</sup> While this difference between a clientelist system and a patriarchal one may seem of little consequence, it removes the idea that the cause of political stagnation is one of culture or religion. This assertion is supported by research which has identified dynamics of clientelism all over the world, providing a theoretical framework in which arguments of "culturally based irrationality" are undermined.<sup>102</sup> This is especially important for the purposes of this study, as it provides a theoretical basis on which to examine political

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<sup>99</sup> Once again, this will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Flynn, "Class, Clientelism and Coercion: Some Mechanisms of Internal Dependency and Control," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* Vol. 2 Issue 2: 135.

<sup>101</sup> Schmidt et al., xxxv.

<sup>102</sup> Kaufman, 285.



constructs in the Arab region as a series of rationally constructed exchanges between the regime and various non-state political actors.

### *Clientelism*

Outlining what is actually meant by the term ‘clientelism’ will now monopolize the remainder of this chapter, as the literature on the phenomenon is quite extensive. As mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical framework behind patron-client theory developed in the 1940s with a series of anthropological and sociological studies on the nature of inter-personal relationships.<sup>103</sup> It was only in the 1970s that serious attention was given to this phenomenon in the wider social sciences.<sup>104</sup> Essentially, patron-client theory discusses a reality in which a personalized and reciprocal relationship between an inferior and a superior party develops on the basis of creating a mutually beneficial relationship.<sup>105</sup> Key to this definition is the idea of the asymmetrical nature of this relationship, in which one party has much greater control over the allocation of power and resources. If the client gains too much strength, the system collapses.<sup>106</sup> Unlike other exchanges, clientelism is never fully legitimized, remaining always in some way an informal and voluntary agreement.<sup>107</sup>

Dyadic clientelist relations are the base level in which this phenomenon exists. That said, dyadic exchanges come in various forms, many of which are not clientelist. For instance, dyadic relationships can exist at the horizontal level, consisting of mutual exchanges of resources between actors of the same level. Typically these dyads form when actors at the same societal level provide different resources to the relationship,

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<sup>103</sup> Eisenstaat and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Lemarchand and Lagg, 151.

<sup>106</sup> Kaufman, 285.

<sup>107</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 4.

resulting in equal benefit to both.<sup>108</sup> These exchanges allow both actors to obtain resources at lower cost than can otherwise be secured *ad hoc* in the market place.<sup>109</sup> Since there is no clear hierarchy between the actors, this relationship can not be considered clientelist, a phenomenon which demands a clear power asymmetry.<sup>110</sup>

The same is true of dyadic exchanges that happen within primordial units such as the family or tribe. Here, the exchange of resources may be linked to social motivations which ignore reciprocal demands. Clientelist interactions however, must consist of an exchange which has been determined by the more powerful of the two participants.<sup>111</sup>

Within a society, dyads eventually form chains and finally pyramid structures in which regional patrons provide services for multiple local clients.<sup>112</sup> While many of these processes could be carried out by primordial groups, that is not always necessarily the case. In traditional societies, relations between a landlord and local peasants, common throughout Europe and other agrarian cultures, marks the most easily observable examples of non-primordial interactions.<sup>113</sup>

One of the strengths of clientelist theory was the theoretical understanding that the phenomenon evolves along side a country's economic development.<sup>114</sup> Where as patriarchal ties are predominant between actors within traditional societies, clientelism continues to evolve along with a modernizing society, becoming a phenomenon based on "formalized general exchange" on an institutionalized level.<sup>115</sup> New patron-client

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<sup>108</sup> Schmidt et al., xiv-xv.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>110</sup> Lemarchand and Lagg, 151

<sup>111</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 48.

<sup>112</sup> Christopher Clapham ed., Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 6.

<sup>113</sup> Clapham, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 12.

<sup>115</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 37, 227.

identities are formed as personal relationships are replaced by institutional ones such as union or party membership.<sup>116</sup> According to Eisenstadt and Roniger, “instead of limited, direct personal relations to one patron, more complicated networks of patrons, brokers and clients emerge. These are often organized pyramidally, consisting of chains that may run right through the administration.”<sup>117</sup> This industrialized clientelism sees local strong men become merely a chain linking the periphery to politicians and administrators who often use “their positions to build a personal following and [to] gain access to official positions in the administration, then wield the resources and services controlled by their incumbency to expand their clientelist network.”<sup>118</sup>

Brokers and middle men will always represent a challenge to the patron as they themselves press to control relations with the client.<sup>119</sup> As power becomes centralized however, the patron institution (usually the government itself at this stage), will seek to create direct links with the periphery.<sup>120</sup> This allows the regime to have greater autonomy while reducing the power of rival bases within the system. This can be done using party officials and bureaucratic institutions which become strong enough to link the core to the periphery. By frustrating the advancement of brokers, regimes create a system by which the only way to advance is to please the patron directly and without the filter of a broker’s demands. This also allows the regime more freedom to focus the attention of their different clients by creating a sense of rivalry between them. This undermines horizontal solidarity between groups that may otherwise join together.<sup>121</sup> For the most

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<sup>116</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 22.

<sup>117</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 228.

<sup>118</sup> Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, 11-12.

<sup>119</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 244.

<sup>120</sup> Schmidt et al., 326.

<sup>121</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt and René Lemarchand, Political Clientelism: Patronage and Development (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), 276.

part, such a transition is essential to maintaining stability in the system, as the modern age opens up a wealth of information to the periphery, allowing clients to compare patrons and withdraw support if they find an exchange which is better suited to them.<sup>122</sup> If the patron bypasses the broker, they can deal directly with weaker elements of society which may be co-opted with fewer resources. The greater the power difference is between patron and client, the more the weaker actor will have no choice but to remain in the relationship or lose the ability to access the basic resources needed for survival.<sup>123</sup>

Key to this development is the system of controls a patron can place over political or economic power.<sup>124</sup> Control of the political system is perhaps the most common way of achieving this, since a patron-regime has the mechanisms of the state to provide the process with greater legitimacy. Challengers to the patron now can be met with various constitutional restraints. Although the patron-client relationship remains technically informal, legal realities are often introduced to tacitly institutionalize the exchange.<sup>125</sup> In fact, according to Robert R. Kaufman, ideas that clientelism exists in societies with weak legal foundations is fallacious, as the phenomenon is often indirectly facilitated within a strict legal framework.<sup>126</sup> As a patron (again, usually a government regime) obtains hegemonic control over resources and political power and sets up institutional framework to entrench the clientelist exchange, an “encapsulated society” forms and infiltrates all facets of activity.<sup>127</sup> Overtime, the affected society may lose the “ethic of public

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<sup>122</sup> Eisenstadt and Lemarchand, 40.

<sup>123</sup> Schmidt et al., 131.

<sup>124</sup> These systems of control will be discussed with regards to Egypt in the following chapter.

<sup>125</sup> Lemarchand and Lagg, 153.

<sup>126</sup> Kaufman, 294.

<sup>127</sup> Clapham, 9.

allocation” and see clientelist interactions as the only legitimate way to access resources.<sup>128</sup>

This study will attempt to link the above phenomenon to the failure of Egypt to develop democratic institutions in which the Copts can participate. Within the Egyptian system itself, several strategic clientelist relationships have been developed to reward acceptance of the status-quo and weaken those who challenge it. This essentially establishes an intractable reality in which little can be accomplished without the regime’s approval.

Now that clientelism has been selected as a base for the following study, some attention has to be given to what critics have described as the theory’s weakness. From a sociology standpoint, clientelism has been criticised for its assumption of a harmonized society, as there seems to be little discussion of conflict between actors within the paradigm.<sup>129</sup> In the case of the Copts in Egypt, conflict most certainly exists between the community as a whole and other groups within Egyptian society. For the most part however, this conflict is latent, suppressed by the clientelist system. In the cases of manifest conflict which will be discussed in Chapter Four, it will be demonstrated that the modern outbreaks of violence usually occur within the periphery of Egyptian society. Conflict between the patron regime and the client Church however, has not become manifest since the establishment of a clientelist relationship. This is not because conflict disappears, but instead is because positive reciprocity provides a stabilizing function<sup>130</sup> which keeps conflict suppressed.

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<sup>128</sup> Clapham, 8.

<sup>129</sup> Eisenstadt and Lemarchand, 9.

<sup>130</sup> Schmidt et al., 39.

Other criticisms state that the clientelist paradigm is reductionist in nature, narrowing all interactions into one unified category.<sup>131</sup> Within this study however, no claim has been made to suggest that all interactions exist within the clientelist framework, only that this paradigm is an alternative and useful way to describe the system of exchanges which concern Coptic political participation.

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<sup>131</sup> Eisenstadt and Lemarchand, 11.

### CHAPTER THREE: CLIENTELISM AND CONTROL IN THE EGYPTIAN SYSTEM

Now that clientelism has been discussed in theory, focus will shift in this chapter towards examining the process in which the phenomenon has manifested itself within the country's political system. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, British rule over Egypt precipitated a strong shift in governance styles from what existed under the Ottoman Empire. Whereas the Turks had slowly granted Egypt increasing sovereignty over its own affairs, Britain centralized authority in the hands of its military governors. During the Great War, measures were introduced to redesign the Egyptian economy to serve the British war effort, while martial law eliminated a range of civil rights such as the freedoms of speech and assembly.<sup>132</sup> These draconian policies drastically altered the nature of Egyptian political discourse, shifting it from a liberal ideological focus to a nationalist one. Joining in a united front against the British presence, both Christian and Muslim elites formed the *Wafd* party on the basis of creating a free and independent Egypt.<sup>133</sup> British attempts to undermine the party with the help of the Egyptian monarchy only fuelled the nationalist cause, as Sa'ad Zaghlul, the leader of the *Wafd*, became an anti-imperialist hero in the minds of many Egyptians.<sup>134</sup>

The colonial period therefore significantly changed the direction of Egyptian political discourse from one that focused on liberalism and the weakening of executive power to a centralized, ideologically based front against colonialism. The nationalist movement also relied heavily on the individual popularity of leaders like Sa'ad Zaghlul. Whereas before, 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals like al-Afghani and his disciples represented an

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<sup>132</sup> John Marlowe, Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956 (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1965), 219.

<sup>133</sup> Solihin, 7.

<sup>134</sup> Marlowe, 275.

indigenous push for an increasingly critical Egyptian populous, the nationalist movement gained political currency by focusing the attention of the country completely on their promise to eliminate the foreign threat.<sup>135</sup> This ideology would centre on the idea of a strong charismatic leader who would be essential to the battle against imperialist interference. When the Free Officer's Revolution was successful, the growing popularity for a strong personal authority figure was cemented in a new charismatic autocrat who would win self-determination for Egyptians. According to Claude Ake, this phenomenon is not unusual, as charismatic leadership is a key characteristic in the transitional periods of several post-colonial states as the country frees itself from imperial domination.<sup>136</sup> Both Zaghlul and Nasser would fill this role in the Egyptian political environment, shifting the direction of political discourse.

#### *Clientelism Under Nasser*

This charismatic authority would eventually evolve into the ideological cornerstone of Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency. Despite achieving independence from British interference, Nasser would insist that foreign control over key assets like the Suez Canal and the country's agricultural land represented a new front for the Egyptian nationalist struggle.<sup>137</sup> The president's strong charisma further entrenched the public's conception that the political environment demanded centralized authority in a strong leader, and Nasser would waste no time declaring a single national party to push forward the revolutionary changes would characterize his rule.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Hourani, 272.

<sup>136</sup> Claude Ake, A Theory of Political Integration (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1967), 52.

<sup>137</sup> Kassem, 13.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 51.



Charismatic rule begins to degrade slowly after independence in all post colonial states, and new structures of authority must to be built in order to maintain the autocratic structures created by the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>139</sup> One of the most effective foundation to maintain control of the political sphere is the patron-client system. This was the case in Egypt, as a key clientelist bond was formed between the ruling party and the lower classes. Like many leaders in the developing world, Nasser harnessed working class frustration over land issues as part of his basis for his legitimacy.<sup>140</sup> This allowed him to distract attention once more from questions over his regime's lack of democracy through efforts to economically co-opt the population through land re-distribution laws (Before Nasser, the upper class held over 50% of agrarian land<sup>141</sup>). The expanding bureaucracy of the state and the focus on socialism allowed Nasser to bypass the traditional brokers of Egyptian society or *futuwwat* (typically local neighbourhood strongmen), and create a direct connection between the core and periphery.<sup>142</sup>

Another example of Nasser's clientelist control can be examined via the state's relationship with Al-Azhar University. One of the most respected Islamic institutions in the Sunni Muslim world, Al-Azhar was virtually incorporated as "an arm of the state".<sup>143</sup> Older scholars were replaced by new ones trained during Nasser's presidency as state funding increased the University's budget four fold.<sup>144</sup> Not surprisingly, religious rulings, or *fatwas*, began to consistently appear in support of the ruling parties policies.

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<sup>139</sup> Ake, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 1996; reprint, 2002), 109.

<sup>141</sup> Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy, 112.

<sup>142</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 133.

<sup>143</sup> Tamir Moustafa, "Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt," International Journal of Middle East Studies Vol. 32, No.1 (Feb., 2000): 3.

<sup>144</sup> Moustafa, 6.

This was critically important, particularly as Nasser became increasingly criticized by Islamists in Saudi Arabia.<sup>145</sup>

Nasser's death after decades of rule raised questions over the future of the country's political direction. The clientelist authoritarian system, which owed its legacy and legitimized on Nasser's personal popularity now seemed uncertain to survive under Vice President Anwar Sadat.

### *Clientelism Under Sadat*

The survival of state authoritarianism required Sadat's clientelist foundation to break away from Nasser's in order to cement his own legitimacy. Starting with the undermining of political rivals like Ali Sabri and Muhammad Fawzi<sup>146</sup>, Sadat moved quickly to establish a new support base that would be loyal to his rule and not that of the late president.<sup>147</sup> In order to establish his legitimacy, Sadat moved to establish new patron-client relationships by becoming allies with Nasser's arch-rivals, the Muslim Brotherhood. Soon Sadat freed hundreds of Islamists from prison and began to establish himself as "the Believer President" of an Islamic society.<sup>148</sup> Further measures ordered three thousand hours of state television to be dedicated to Islamic programming in attempt to further co-opt Muslim religious groups.<sup>149</sup> Using Islam as an ideological foundation for legitimacy also allowed Sadat to later undermine secular opposition groups, especially the socialist *Tagammu* party, which Sadat continually accused of being communist agents of the Soviet Union.<sup>150</sup> Since criticizing Islam would result in political

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>146</sup> Both Sabri and Fawzi were members of the military and close allies of President Nasser. It quickly became clear their loyalty did not extend to the new president.

<sup>147</sup> Kassem, 21.

<sup>148</sup> Shatzmiller, 29.

<sup>149</sup> Shatzmiller, 37.

<sup>150</sup> Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy*, 46.

suicide, many of these groups found they could not compete with the regime for political space.<sup>151</sup> Sadat also pushed to gain outside support by pursuing policies which would legitimize his presidency with the West, such as expelling Soviet advisors in 1972, opening up the Egyptian economy in 1974, and beginning negotiations with Israel in 1977.<sup>152</sup>

### *Clientelism Under Mubarak*

Hosni Mubarak would enjoy an Egyptian political culture which had now largely accepted an authoritarian executive and the patron-client system as a political norm. That said, challenges still existed to the authoritarian structure. In his first term, Mubarak was confronted by a new multi-party system (which Sadat had introduced in 1977) and growing demands for change. In order to counter any challenges to his legitimacy, Mubarak made sweeping promises of political reform in 1984, including the pledge to stay in office for only two terms.<sup>153</sup> Once his patron-client network was established however, Mubarak's message soon shifted, arguing that democracy in the country would have to come in stages proportional to what Egyptians could absorb.<sup>154</sup>

The Mubarak regime also made strong use of their secular identity to maintain popularity. This major change from Sadat was the result of increasing violence perpetrated by radical Islamists groups which had broken away from the Brotherhood and began attacking state security forces, tourists and Egyptian Christians.<sup>155</sup> After attacks on tourists saw the Egyptian economy lose over three billion dollars annually, Mubarak was

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<sup>151</sup> In the modern context, Islam continues to represent a hegemonic political symbol. Today however, the Islamic political identity is monopolized by the Muslim Brotherhood and not the ruling party. This is an important reason why the Brotherhood is so effective at surviving Mubarak's attempts to undermine them.

<sup>152</sup> Kassem, 23.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>155</sup> Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy*, 70.

able to raise his popularity (and delay democratization indefinitely) under the guise of fighting a war against Islamic extremism.<sup>156</sup> September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, allowed Mubarak to use this justification on more than the Egyptian populace, as the United States and other Western countries became quick to accept the regime's claims that exceptional measures were needed to fight the War on Terrorism.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, the regime has used fear of an extremist Islamic regime coming to power to convince many in Egypt, particularly Coptic Christians to support the proverbial 'devil they know' rather than tempt a shift to the status quo.<sup>158</sup> In this way, Mubarak pushed to create his own ideological image as the secular, moderate strongman that stands firmly between the Egyptian people and Islamic radicalism.

### **Tactical Clientelism Within the Egyptian System**

Now that the historical development and political ramifications of the patron-client system in Egypt have been established, focus will shift to describe the specific powers that the government has formed in order to monopolize control over Egypt's political sphere. These controls will be broken down into several key areas which the ruling party uses to systematically reward clients and frustrate opposition.

The ruling party has used the clientelist system repeatedly to undermine its opposition. According to the Ibn Khaldun Center, Egypt has the most developed institutional infrastructure in the Arab world, one that is capable of sustaining full democracy.<sup>159</sup> Many Egyptians however, choose to support the ruling National Democratic Party in order to access resources and build up their communities. This was

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>157</sup> Helmore and Jamal, 1.

<sup>158</sup> Brewka and Jamal, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Zaki, 23.

a critical element in the 2000 parliamentary elections, as politicians needed to win voter trust in order to gain critical village loyalties for their campaigns.<sup>160</sup> This focus on developing clientelist relationships with voters has had a degrading effect on debate within the National Assembly, as Egyptian political activity has begun to rotate entirely around politicians who endlessly seek to secure narrow campaign promises made to powerful individual supporters.<sup>161</sup> In this type of relationship, the ruling party will have a decisive advantage over the opposition, as it alone has access to state resources and the ability to make credible promises. Once their patron has fulfilled their promises, the various authority groups, whether they be the primordial family or clan, business or religious authority, will not only accept their patron's authority, but also work to make sure everyone under their own control gives allegiance to their new patron. According to Maye Kassem the clientelist bond "binds leaders and followers in a relationship not only of mutual assistance and support, but also recognized and accepted inequality between big men and lesser men..."<sup>162</sup> The executive and the ruling NDP party therefore is able to establish its authority through the creation of these clientelist relationships which establish vertical power structures that permeate all levels of society.

The establishment of patron-client relations is therefore a key foundation of Egyptian authoritarian rule. By co-opting key support bases, the regime is able to tie its survival to its supporter's advancement, giving them a personal stake in maintaining the status-quo. Even Egyptian political culture is shaped to depend on the ruling party's continuing domination, as various authority groups within society conclude the only way to access state resources is through supporting the NDP.

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<sup>160</sup> Makram-Ebeid, 41.

<sup>161</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 56.

<sup>162</sup> Kassem, 4.

### *Constitutional Control*

Constitutional change has been used since the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser to legitimize the executive's political platform.<sup>163</sup> Post-revolutionary Egypt has seen no less than seven constitutions, each often radically altering the political landscape of the country. For example, the 1958 Constitution eliminated parliament to prepare for Egypt's short-lived union with Syria, while the 1964 document ordered half the seats in subsequent parliaments to be filled with "workers and peasants" to increase the chance of election victories for loyal civil servants.<sup>164</sup> The current constitution was proclaimed on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1971 and denotes considerable space laying out extraordinary control the executive authority enjoys over the state.<sup>165</sup> An overview of the Constitution makes this imbalance clear, as sixty-three percent of powers are given to the presidency, while only twenty-five percent are awarded to the legislature and only two percent for the judiciary and cabinet respectively.<sup>166</sup> Article 5 of the Constitution, designed to outline the balance of power between the branches of the state clearly illustrates the significant powers of the executive.<sup>167</sup> They include, according to Article 112 and Article 147, the right of the executive to create and revoke legislation<sup>168</sup>, draft the state budget and unilaterally declare a state of emergency.<sup>169</sup> The latter right was exercised in 1981 shortly after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat and has been used to increase executive authority

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 18. Although argued to be an expression of socialism, the idea of guaranteeing "workers" in parliament was always problematic, if not entirely disingenuous. The definition of "worker" was designed to maximize the amount of Presidential supporters in parliament.

<sup>165</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 19.

<sup>166</sup> Negad al-Borai, The Independence of the Judiciary: The Truth As it Is! [research paper online] (Cairo: United Group, accessed 30 Dec. 2005); available from <http://www.ug-law.com/eng/unitedgroup-post.pdf>, 8.

<sup>167</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 19.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>169</sup> Kassem, 24.

ever since. These emergency laws are not only seen in Egypt but throughout the Arab world, and are a major criticism of the *2004 Arab Human Development Report*.<sup>170</sup> In Egypt, these measures include and are not limited to, restrictions on freedoms of mobility, assembly and residence, the increase of police search and arrest powers as well as the ability to bypass normal criminal courts.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, the emergency laws stipulate that the country's opposition parties must provide notice of all activities to the Ministry of Interior, allowing the ruling NDP to interfere and disrupt campaign and organizing efforts.<sup>172</sup> Finally, Egypt's emergency laws also allow the president to arrest individuals without charge and hold them for forty-five days (this can be extended indefinitely<sup>173</sup>), a tactic used against many of Egypt's estimated 12,000 to 15,000 political prisoners.<sup>174</sup>

The executive's control over the state is therefore legitimized in the nation's basic law, protecting it from open legal challenges. Even more important however, it allows the executive multiple fronts on which to frustrate challengers, as opposition parties and even members of the other branches of government are faced with the realization that political change can rarely occur legally outside the approval of the president. Furthermore, no concrete steps have been taken by President Mubarak to fulfill his campaign pledge to end the use of the country's emergency laws (renewed shortly before the 2005 election), a reform that would be tenuous at best, due to the President's ability to renew the state of emergency at will.

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<sup>170</sup> Brewka and Jamal, 15.

<sup>171</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 36.

<sup>172</sup> Kassem, 56.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 37.

At least on one occasion, the executive has offered amendments to the constitution in order to appease its political clients. In 1971, President Anwar Sadat approved a motion to declare Islamic *Shari'ah* “a” source of law in the Republic. Later in 1980, this article was amended again to state that *Shari'ah* would be “the” source of law for the constitution, further amassing the support of Islamists.<sup>175</sup> Clearly however, this was an empty gesture on behalf of the state, as attempts by judges to use *Shari'ah* in rulings have lead to their dismissal.<sup>176</sup> Still, the ability to entice support through amendments to the country’s highest law is a key power of the executive.

#### *Judicial and Parliamentary Controls*

The constitutional powers granted to the executive allow it to control and influence much of the activities of the other two branches of the state. The executive’s influence then ties both branches into a reality in which they are politically or financially rewarded for supporting the status quo.

The President’s control over the parliament begins with the ability to directly appoint representatives to both houses of the Assembly. In the *Maglis al-Sha’ab* this only accounts for ten members, but the upper house (*Maglis al-Shurah*) presidential supporters receive a full one-third of the seats automatically.<sup>177</sup> This creates a substantial bloc of parliamentarians whose political career rests entirely on supporting the executive’s policies. The President also controls the parliament with his ability to call the assembly to order and send it to recess at will. The parliament therefore can only meet at the pleasure of the executive branch, and cannot meet without its approval.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Shatzmiller, 72.

<sup>176</sup> Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World*. (New York: I.B. Tarus, 2003; reprint, 2005), 170.

<sup>177</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se’ada,, 20.

<sup>178</sup> al-Borai, *The Independence of the Judiciary*, 6.



The executive also creates the state budget, which the parliament (under Article 15 of the Constitution) is not allowed to amend without Presidential permission.<sup>179</sup> Unilateral control of the state's budget gives the executive extraordinary power over the other branches, giving the president control over financial incentives which can be used to co-opt various support bases, such as the military and the judiciary.<sup>180</sup>

The President's NDP party has enjoyed, since the introduction of the multi-party system in 1977, a complete domination of the legislature. This is in large part due to the fact that the National Democratic Party has access to state resources in order to frustrate the opposition.<sup>181</sup> Whereas the opposition parties find their political organization efforts hampered by the Ministry of the Interior, the NDP is free to promote its campaigns at will.<sup>182</sup> In 1995, the popular (but officially banned) Muslim Brotherhood was only able to win one seat in parliament due to extreme state interference.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, access to state political/economic resources as well as contact with the executive allows individual NDP candidates the ability to make credible patrimonial promises to their supporters.<sup>184</sup>

Perhaps the most striking aspect of parliamentary dynamics in Egypt is that any critical remarks against the executive are technically illegal under Articles 98b, 102b and 174 of the Penal Code.<sup>185</sup> Such laws, strictly speaking, outlaw all political discourse which does not support the ruling party and can be used to quell opposition dissent in the parliament if necessary. Members of Parliament do enjoy legal protections, but immunity can be removed if the majority of the People's Assembly vote in favour of the motion.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>180</sup> The regime's relationship with both the judiciary and military will be examined later in this paper.

<sup>181</sup> Makram-Ebeid, 33.

<sup>182</sup> Kassem, 56.

<sup>183</sup> Makram-Ebeid, 35.

<sup>184</sup> Kassem, 56.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 57.

Since the ruling NDP has held the overwhelming majority in parliament since the current multi-party system was established, this gives them a key weapon against political opponents. Such was the case when Islamist MP Sayid Fath al-Bab was stripped of his protections because of his work against the NDP in the lower house.<sup>186</sup>

It is clear therefore that the state's interference in the legislative process creates a system in which opposition parties are powerless to gain political goals.<sup>187</sup> While the ruling NDP party has no trouble finding candidates to run in all districts, most secular parties are unable to develop the manpower to ever seriously challenge the regime's majority. This is because running for the ruling party often results in access to state resources; whereas running for the opposition is largely pursued for ideological purposes and lacks opportunities for economic and professional advancement.

The judiciary also lacks independence from the executive, despite the claim by the Constitution (Article 165, 166) of a strong separation of powers.<sup>188</sup> First, the judicial authority is divided among several institutions, forcing power to be dispersed, rather than concentrated in the hands of a traditional judicial structure. The first parallel institution created by the executive for this purpose was the State Security Court, formed in 1964.<sup>189</sup> These emergency courts, found all over the Arab region, are not only used to try those accused of military crimes, but also for civilian offenders.<sup>190</sup> In Egypt, these special courts (legalized by Article 170 and 173 of the constitution<sup>191</sup>), began to charge political

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>187</sup> This generally is the case for the secular opposition, but political efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood can also be frustrated through state security systems.

<sup>188</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 26.

<sup>189</sup> Kassem, 19.

<sup>190</sup> Brewka and Jamal, 91.

<sup>191</sup> Ouda, 26.

and Islamist opponents in 1992 and civilian offenders in 1995.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, unlike military courts in the West, the regime can opt to bypass the normal judiciary and prosecute civilian defendants and in a court controlled by military officers.

In 1969, the second parallel judiciary was created in order to strengthen Nasser's legitimacy after his defeat to the Israelis in the Six Days War.<sup>193</sup> The Supreme Constitutional Court is, technically speaking, the most senior court in the country, but legal analysts argue that the constitution remains very vague as to whether it is part of the normal judiciary or not.<sup>194</sup> If it remains outside of the normal judiciary, then constitutional protections regarding separation of powers do not apply. What is clear however, is that protections or not, the executive does control the SCC and its decisions. Each member is chosen by the executive, and the President himself has no restrictions on the choice of his appointee, making a promotion to the SCC a supreme act of patronage from the president to his closest supporters.<sup>195</sup>

The dominance of the regime over the SCC was clearly demonstrated when the Court finally ruled in 2000 on a ten year old case challenging the executive's supervision of polling stations during national elections. The court ruled against the executive, but only because the President gave them permission to do so in an attempt to shore up his legitimacy after criticisms of the 1995 election.<sup>196</sup> The fact that the executive can freeze a controversial ruling for ten years is testament to the reality that the SCC remains ready to carry out the task that it was created for, namely, the implement of the regime's policies in a manner which builds legitimacy in the eyes of the Egyptian people.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>193</sup> Kassem, 19.

<sup>194</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 27.

<sup>195</sup> al-Borai, The Independence of the Judiciary, 16.

<sup>196</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 31.

Finally, the president also has power over the traditional judiciary as well, both by controlling their selection and the treasury from which their salaries are paid<sup>197</sup> (the President also has the power to appoint and promote all of the country's Public Prosecutors, giving the executive even more control over the legal system<sup>198</sup>). Moreover, according to Law 46 of 1972, the Ministry of Justice has the right to supervise the activities of all judges.<sup>199</sup> From this, it controls the promotion and disciplinary actions which it can carry out unilaterally. For instance, laws enacted in 1972 and 1974 allow the executive to promote a judge to a higher circuit for as long as they deem necessary (in renewable six month terms).<sup>200</sup> This tactic can also be used for the Public Prosecutors and creates a system by which the person in question remains permanently co-opted by the state. At any time the executive can demote the judge/lawyer back to his previous position, forcing the individual to continually seek to carry out the will of the regime. These temporary posts can be extremely lucrative, adding a powerful financial incentive to comply.<sup>201</sup>

The Ministry of Justice also controls the Judicial Inspectors Directorate, which is charged with disciplining and dismissing judges that are unfit for duty.<sup>202</sup> This, like many other powers given to the executive, lacks safeguards to prevent it from being abused for political purposes. For instance, the Minister of Justice has the right to dismiss a judge for health reasons that compromise his ability to carry out his duties. This decision however, does not require confirmation by any medical institution.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>198</sup> al-Borai, The Independence of the Judiciary, 24.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 33.

Moreover, Article 111 of Law 46 (1972) also allows the Ministry to dismiss any judge that is unfit for his position, offering the executive limitless excuses to remove judges that challenge their authority.<sup>204</sup>

The control over the parliament and judiciary adds further legal barriers to political change, as the executive works to create a system in which professional success in these institutions is tied directly to maintaining the status-quo. Challenging the government in any meaningful way would result in, at best, the closing of lucrative financial opportunities and an end to professional advancement. Serious challenges may very well result in disciplinary issues which can end a career outright.

### *Economic Control*

Another effective tool in establishing state autonomy and authority is found in Egypt's economic policies. One of the fundamental controls most citizens have over their state is the government's reliance on taxation as a source of income. Compared to most developing countries however, Egypt relies disproportionately on external rents, allowing them to have greater economic autonomy from their citizenry.<sup>205</sup> While the idea of rent traditionally is seen as a major factor only in the Gulf States, Egypt has its own major sources of rent, including oil, tourism, Suez Canal income, workers' remittances and foreign aid. These sources of income by 1980 accounted for twenty-four percent of the country's wealth, giving the state extraordinary autonomy from its citizens.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>205</sup> Richards and Waterbury, 17.

<sup>206</sup> Paul Rivlin, "Egypt's Demographic Challenges," Middle East Review of International Affairs Volume 7, No. 4 (December 2003) [journal online] accessed on 1 January 2006, available from <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue4/jv7n4a2.html>.

Government spending during the Post-Revolutionary period also drastically increased, from 18.5 percent of the country's GDP in 1954 to 55.7 percent in 1970.<sup>207</sup> Due to the constitutional controls the executive has over the state, the President continues to enjoy almost complete control over the distribution of this wealth.<sup>208</sup> This monopolization of the state's resources by the executive easily leads to corruption as the ruling party, unchecked, uses this wealth as tools for political patronage.<sup>209</sup> Moreover, instead of using this income for structural reform programs, Egypt, like most Arab regimes, often spent the funds on grand public or social works projects in order to gain legitimacy from its citizens.<sup>210</sup> Although key reforms were carried out during the 1990s, they were aided by massive debt relief given to Egypt as reward for its support during the Gulf War. For example, Egyptian political and military co-operation lead to pressure by America and several Gulf states on various institutions, causing many to forgive their loans. The Paris Club alone wrote off over 10.1 billion dollars of the Egyptian debt, making reforms much more manageable.<sup>211</sup> Despite this unprecedented assistance, Mubarak still remained cautious with serious economic reform, because structural readjustment would lead to a serious challenge of his presidency.<sup>212</sup> In fact, the early nineties (when initial economic reforms were being taken), were some of the bloodiest in Egyptian history, with over 1,000 deaths.<sup>213</sup> The violence was rooted in the disruption of

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<sup>207</sup> Owen, 24.

<sup>208</sup> Eberhard Kienle, A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 24.

<sup>209</sup> Celasun, xvii.

<sup>210</sup> Richards and Waterbury, 214.

<sup>211</sup> Rivlin, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue4/jv7n4a2.html> .

<sup>212</sup> The Brotherhood found increasing support amongst the lower class as state subsidies weakened.

<sup>213</sup> Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy, 168.

what Maye Kassem describes as the authoritarian “social contract” in which the state provides economic rights in return for worker class submission.<sup>214</sup>

State interference in the economy can also be felt in the massive state-owned enterprises which are found throughout Egypt. Through these corporations, authoritarian states can maintain control over their populations who now rely on the state, and not the private sector, for employment and basic services. This massive interference in economy has made the state completely indispensable, giving millions of people a direct economic interest in maintaining the political status quo.<sup>215</sup>

In all, the government of Egypt provides work for over twenty-five million people (35 percent of the population) through the civil service and various state owned enterprises. Moreover, SOEs, even after initial privatization efforts, still account for sixty percent of non-agricultural output.<sup>216</sup> Controlling these industries is essential to maintaining authoritarian power, as any disintegration of Egyptian financial realities would result in widespread discontent and serious challenges to the regime’s authority.

The monopolization of the workforce by the state occurred shortly after independence, as the government set wages without reference to the private sector, attracting the most skilled workers to its industries.<sup>217</sup> This policy was so successful that the decade after the revolution saw the bureaucracy grow from 350,000 workers to over one million.<sup>218</sup> By drawing the best professional minds away from the private sector, the Egyptian state was able to greatly increase in political authority and economic autonomy.

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<sup>214</sup> Kassem, 13.

<sup>215</sup> Celasun, 26.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>218</sup> Owen, 24.

The government presence in the workforce also increased as state institutions have made a concerted effort to lower unemployment by unnecessarily increasing the size of bureaucracy and SOEs. Besides being economically unsound, these programs make efforts to privatize companies (300 companies in 1991)<sup>219</sup> extremely difficult, as responsible down-sizing often leads to unemployment and the types of violence mentioned above.<sup>220</sup>

The economic foundation of Egyptian authoritarianism is absolutely critical to the regime's ability to monopolize the state's political sphere. Mubarak's tentativeness to continue the reforms which started in the early 1990s demonstrates a clear choice to continue the pursuit of personal power over the wellbeing of the Egyptian economy. That said, until those consequences manifest themselves, Mubarak and the NDP continue to maintain control of state resources and businesses, forcing Egyptians to have a powerful economic stake in the status quo.

#### *Control over Civil Society*

One of the strongest challenges to the ruling party has been Egyptian civil society. According to most experts, civil society challenges the authoritarian system because it consists of a plurality of actors each vying for their particular interests and place in the country's political sphere. Civil society in Egypt has done much to disintegrate the parochial political culture within the country's society that the regime relies upon to continue its patriarchal role.

The executive authority has typically challenged the growth of civil society by passing laws which tie its existence to ministries within the government. This was the

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<sup>219</sup> Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy*, 150.

<sup>220</sup> The violence stems not merely from workers being unemployed, but also because of ideas that guaranteed employment is part of the patron-client relationship with the state.



case with Nasser, whose presidency was threatened early on by the growing power of unions and labour groups within the country. To combat this, the executive passed legislation (Law 32 of 1964) which allowed the government to dissolve any association which was not in line with “security measures”.<sup>221</sup> Further labour laws attempted to appease unions by pledging no dismissal without cause if unions did not engage in strikes. Failure to accept this bargain was met with a swift military response, as a 1953 strike in Imbaba led to 300 arrests as tanks and soldiers moved to end the standoff.<sup>222</sup>

Over time, Nasser began to deal with this problem by integrating the unions into the state apparatus. This was accomplished through the creation of the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, a government umbrella association which would safeguard workers rights.<sup>223</sup> This would allow the government to again have direct control over the various emerging labour groups.

Although human rights groups, such as the Partisan’s Association of Human Rights in Cairo/Alexandria developed during the 1970s, they simply acted as mouthpieces of government propaganda. It was not until 1987 that the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights became the country’s first independent NGO dedicated to monitoring state abuses of human rights. The work of the EOHR has done much to gain the disapproval of the regime which has never formally recognized the association.<sup>224</sup> Although remaining outside the law allows the association more freedom from state control, it leaves it vulnerable to stiff legal penalties which the government can apply at will.

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<sup>221</sup> Kassem, 88.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 119.

In 2003 the government implemented a new Associations Law (Law 84 of 2002) which maintains the government's control over NGOs and civil society groups. The law forces the review of NGO registration by the Ministry of the Interior and security services and allows the President to dissolve any association at will by administrative order.<sup>225</sup> The law also allows the government authority over who sits on an association's board of directors, as well as giving it the power to interfere with funding.<sup>226</sup> Legal recognition of non-governmental organizations and other civil associations therefore places groups at the mercy of the Ministry of Justice/Interior and the presidential authority. Fears of organizations having their activities frozen understandably restrict NGO willingness to deal with sensitive issues.

The regime also weakens civil society by placing pressure on individual leaders who challenge the executive's authority. In March 2005, several government mosques used their Friday sermon to condemn human rights advocates such as Negad al-Borai and Saad Eddin Ibrahim as traitors to Egypt for their organization's acceptance of foreign funding.<sup>227</sup> Even more disturbing, on several occasions, supporters of the regime have moved to arrest and charge those who challenge the status quo. Quoting the 1996 Press Law which forbids journalist from engaging in slander, members of the Ministry of the Interior charged and imprisoned Magdi Ahmed Hussein, editor of *al-Sha'ab* Newspaper, for a story which claimed the Minister's son had used his father's position as leverage in

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<sup>225</sup> "Egypt: Civil Society Groups Severely Restricted," Human Rights Watch 4 July 2005 (accessed on 2 January 2006); available from <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/07/04/egypt11217.htm>.

<sup>226</sup> "Egypt: Civil Society Groups Severely Restricted," Human Rights Watch.

<sup>227</sup> "Egypt: Margins of Repression; State Limits on Nongovernmental Organization Activism," Human Rights Watch July 2005 (accessed on 2 January 2006); available from <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/egypt0705/index.htm>.

several key business deals.<sup>228</sup> Other reformers, like the aforementioned Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim and politician Ayman Nour have both spent time in prison for their reform activities. Moreover, Amnesty International has documented several cases in which non-violent civilian activists were tried within emergency military courts.<sup>229</sup> The regime also takes a heavy handed approach to protests as well, as a four month long non-violent demonstration by Sudanese citizens seeking asylum in Mohandessin (Cairo) was brutally broken up by security forces officers in December 2005, leading to the death of over twenty individuals.<sup>230</sup>

Legal restrictions as well as tacit and overt threats of force are used to contain Egypt's civil society from seriously challenging the regime directly. Although NGOs have done much to politicize civil actors to challenge the executive's monopoly, little can be done to directly remove the ruling parties control over Egypt's political environment.

#### *Monopolization of the Tools of Force*

Critical to any authoritarian system is its ability to use overwhelming force to maintain its rule against what it cannot control through the other foundations of the regime's power. While the dynamics listed above frustrate traditional avenues of reform, only a disproportionately powerful state security apparatus can contain attempts to achieve change through more radical means. That said, the Egyptian state, under President Mubarak, has also used the military to during election periods to contain legal challenges to his party's rule.

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<sup>228</sup> "Egypt: Muzzling Civil Society," Amnesty International 19 September 2000 (accessed on 2 January 2006); available from <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGMDE120212000>.

<sup>229</sup> Amnesty International.

<sup>230</sup> "Cairo Violence Toll Rises to 27," BBC News Online 2 January 2006 (accessed on 2 January 2006); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4575496.stm>.

According to Roger Owen, it is essential for the authoritarian state to “destroy what it cannot control.”<sup>231</sup> During the presidency of Gamal Abdul Nasser, the regime targeted its opponents with ruthless efficiency in the name of the revolution. Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood found themselves swept away through force<sup>232</sup> as the country adopted secular socialism as a guiding principle. Sadat originally attempted to use Nasser’s Islamists opponents as allies for his regime, but growing radicalism and outspoken condemnation for the president’s peace deal with Israel led to a massive crackdown by security forces resulting in over 1,500 arrests in the late 1980s.<sup>233</sup>

Mubarak’s presidency would mark a full confrontation between the state and Islamic radical groups. Despite Sadat’s efforts before his assassination, Islamist leaders and groups had sought to use force in order to carve out space for their authority within the Egyptian political sphere. For example, during the 1980s, an Islamist leader named Shaykh Gaber moved his supporters into a desperately poor Cairo neighbourhood near Imbaba and claimed the area as his own. The state, alerted by an embarrassing Reuter’s report moved in with 12,000 police to engage in a three week battle that left over six hundred arrests and casualties.<sup>234</sup> Thousands of political prisoners were taken throughout the country, as radical imams were forced under house arrest or even had their mosques surrounded by police on Fridays.<sup>235</sup> These restrictions, combined with economic hardships felt during IMF restructuring, lead to a sharp increase in violence and repression by the state, resulting in the death of 1,164 people from 1990-1993.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Owen, 27.

<sup>232</sup> Kassem, 137.

<sup>233</sup> Kassem, 144.

<sup>234</sup> Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy, 87.

<sup>235</sup> Kassem, 150.

<sup>236</sup> Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy, 168.

Mubarak continually uses state security to obtain political victories for the NDP party during parliamentary elections. During 1995, corruption was rampant, with supporters of the ruling party being allowed to stuff ballot boxes while the opposition was refused entry.<sup>237</sup> Although the state pledged to end these policies in the 2000 elections, police still prevented opposition supporters from entering polling stations in key districts while plain clothed agents caused disturbances amongst those waiting to vote, giving police an excuse to interfere.<sup>238</sup> Independent judicial supervisors were powerless to stop what happened outside the stations, which the law clearly stipulated was the limit of their jurisdiction.<sup>239</sup>

The lead up to parliamentary elections in 2005 did lead many to seriously question whether the regime would truly live up to its renewed pledge to stay neutral during the campaign, as police forces allowed the Muslim Brotherhood enormous freedoms to organize.<sup>240</sup> These hopes disintegrated however, as impressive victories by the Brotherhood during initial rounds of the elections lead to massive disruptions by security forces in the second and third stage. The tactics used by the police remained consistent with the two previous parliamentary elections, with opposition supporters being refused entry to the polling stations of key districts.<sup>241</sup>

The state often uses fears of terrorism to justify its security measures. This was especially true during the struggle against radical Islamists groups during the 1990s, as laws pushed to expand the definition of terrorism to allow the President more options in

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<sup>237</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 50.

<sup>238</sup> Kassem, 60.

<sup>239</sup> Ouda, al-Borai and Abu Se'ada, 50.

<sup>240</sup> Amira Howaidy, "Egypt's Brotherhood Takes Center Stage," *Al Jazeera Online* 14 November 2005 (accessed 5 November 2005); available from <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/DD81F58B-4247-413D-8A97-57508546AD73.htm>.

<sup>241</sup> Mohammad El Sayeed, "No Voting Allowed," *Al Ahram Weekly* 1-7 December 2005 Issue 771 [online newspaper]; accessed on 8 December, 2005; available from <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/771/eg1.htm>.

dealing with resistance.<sup>242</sup> After September 11, 2001, these arguments were met with increasing approval from Egypt's Western allies who have encouraged the regime to use whatever efforts are necessary to win the global "War on Terror".<sup>243</sup> By strengthening one of the authoritarian foundations of power, international agents have given additional space for military responses against those seeking change within the Egyptian system, whether through radical or democratic means.

Since the revolution, the Egyptian executive authority has moved to monopolize the country's political sphere by assuming control over any avenue in which reform could legally take place and using this position to co-opt challenges. The patron-client relationship therefore allows the regime to have the space to progress or regress on issues like political or economic reform unilaterally, taking whatever measures are needed to ensure its hold on power at any given time. The state also uses the threat of force to quell groups which do not respond to conventional pressure. These factors immobilize political change and create longstanding social realities which internalize the legitimacy of authoritarian rule. Over time, these parochial attitudes become a serious societal barrier to change and can develop into overt hostility against actors challenging the status quo.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibrahim, Egypt, Islam and Democracy, 155.

<sup>243</sup> Helmore and Jamal, 1.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: ISLAM AND THE IMPACT OF COPTIC MENTALITIES OF VULNERABILITY

One of the minimum demands for any group is a subsistent livelihood and physical security.<sup>244</sup> Protection from external threats has therefore represented a key foundation for many social structures and exchange relationships throughout history. Perhaps the best example of this would be the feudal system of medieval Europe.<sup>245</sup> For several centuries, these institutions would see that communities that pledged their resources to the military elite received protection from the various lords whose vassals maintained the collective order of the region.

The clientelist system differs with the feudal system in many ways, but it does share physical security as a critically important resource. If a patron cannot prevent violence against its client, that individual or group will often cease participation in the exchange. At the same time however, the loss of a client's mentality of vulnerability will also result in the destabilization of the clientelist relationship. This is due to the fact that the level of client's perceived vulnerability largely determines the extent to which they will conform to their patron's goals.<sup>246</sup> Put another way, the greater the sense of strength of the client, the less of a need for a patron and greater the decline in the legitimacy of a clientelist bond.<sup>247</sup>

These two opposing factors create a dynamic by which the most effective environment for a clientelist relationship is one with a strong sense of *perceived* vulnerability. That is to say, in a reality where widespread violence seems present in a

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<sup>244</sup> Schmidt, et al., 440.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>246</sup> Clapham, 12.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 17.

latent form. This is once more because exposure to prolonged *manifest* hostility would call into question the effectiveness of the patron's power.

Since the Muslim conquest of Egypt, Christianity has slowly become a religious minority in the region. Despite commonly held perceptions, this encounter was largely a peaceful and tolerant relationship, particularly within the context of historical norms which dominated this era.<sup>248</sup> Despite the comparatively high level of religious acceptance however, several key periods of persecution did manifest themselves intermittently, creating varying degrees of perceived vulnerability. These periods will now be explored in order to describe the foundation on which this study argues a perceived mentality of Coptic vulnerability exists.

It is important to differentiate however, between these eras as representatives of sporadic periods of history, and longstanding social norms and religious ideals. In particular, misconceptions are often formed around the fallacy that Islam promotes the forceful conversion and persecution of Christianity. In reality, Islamic ideals constructed an environment which was significantly tolerant for the period. The Prophet Muhammad's teachings/examples with regards to *dhimmis*<sup>249</sup> are actually quite systematic, especially considering that many other important issues, including the nature of leadership succession, remained unexplored by his teachings. This was perhaps because the issue of relations with the *dhimmis* were of critical importance during his lifetime, particularly with Jewish tribes living near the city of Medina. When Muslims arrived in the area after fleeing persecution in Mecca, they immediately opened negotiations with nearby Jewish tribes. The conclusions of these discussions and

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<sup>248</sup> Meinardus, 64.

<sup>249</sup> The term *dhimmis* can be described as a protected minority that exists within the Islamic community under a formalized framework with the Muslim authority.



negotiations resulted in what is popularly termed by scholars as the ‘Constitution of Medina’. This document (in articles 24-35, 37, 38 and 46) states that “The Jews of various groups belong to the community, and are to retain their own religion; they and the Muslims are to render ‘help’ (including military aid) to one another when it is needed.”<sup>250</sup> Severe warnings were then made through the *hadith* of the Prophet towards Muslims who would seek to mistreat minorities under Islam’s protection.<sup>251</sup> “Beware whoever is cruel and hard on such people [*dhimmis*] or curtail their rights, or burden them with more than they can endure, or realize anything from them against their free will, I myself will be a complainant against him on the Day of Judgement.”<sup>252</sup> Although the idea of a tax for non-Muslims was recognized, it was to be strictly within their means and only to replace the contributions to society that Muslims made with the *zakat*, the mandatory charity paid by believers each year.<sup>253</sup>

The Prophet’s positive views on the Coptic Christians are also well documented, first with his marriage to the Copt Mariyah Qibtiyyah, and second, with his agreement with the Christian monks of the St. Katherine’s Monastery in Sinai, signed in the year 6 A.H.<sup>254</sup> This agreement stipulated that no Christian cleric would be driven out of Egypt, no monk forced from his monastery, no pilgrim detained from pilgrimage, no churches converted or destroyed; no Christian compelled to reject his religion and no forcible conversion for woman who married Muslims.<sup>255</sup> Speaking of the Copts in general,

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<sup>250</sup> Watt, 5.

<sup>251</sup> The *hadith* represent collected volumes of sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad by his companions.

<sup>252</sup> Mawdudi, 8.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>254</sup> The Muslim lunar calendar begins with the *hijra*, or exodus of Muslims from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.

<sup>255</sup> Doi, 76.

Muhammad is reported to have said to his followers “when you conquer Egypt, be kind to the Copts...for they are your kith and kin.”<sup>256</sup>

The conquest of Egypt in 641 A.D. by Amr Ibn al-‘As and his four thousand cavalry was at first a positive experience for the Coptic Christians, as it freed them from brutal persecution from Constantinople.<sup>257</sup> In fact, when Byzantine forces attempted to retake Egypt in 645-646, the Christian population actively aided Muslim forces in the territory’s defence.<sup>258</sup> Initially, a liberal policy towards religion was taken and the indigenous Christians saw little significant change in their daily lives.<sup>259</sup> The Coptic Church, considered heretical by the Roman Empire, saw a distinct renaissance in both its literature and tradition under early Islamic rule, as it no longer had to remain hidden from foreign oppression.<sup>260</sup> Positive treatment of the *dhimmis* in Egypt seemed to have been of considerable concern to the Muslims, as evidence exists of Caliph Umar writing a strongly worded letter to Amr and his Egyptian garrison for chastising Christians during a public event. In the letter, Umar writes, “since when have you enslaved a people, oh Amr, when their mothers had given birth to them in freedom?”<sup>261</sup> Moreover on an economic level, imperial taxes for non-Muslims, called the *jizyah*, were at first much less than taxes under Byzantine rule.<sup>262</sup>

To state that the Muslim conquest of Egypt and the institution of the *dhimmis* framework was an entirely positive experience for Coptic Christians would, however, be

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<sup>256</sup> Cragg, 173.

<sup>257</sup> This will be explored in detail within Chapter Five.

<sup>258</sup> E.J. Chitham, The Coptic Community in Egypt: Spatial and Social Change (Durham: Centre for Middle East and Islamic Studies, 1986), 56

<sup>259</sup> Vatikiotis, 12.

<sup>260</sup> Richard Fletcher, The Crescent and the Cross: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters between Christians and Muslims. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 40.

<sup>261</sup> Mossa, 188.

<sup>262</sup> Chitham, 56.

a mistake. Living under an authority which held a differing religious creed as a primary social identity eventually would lead to periods of persecution of Christians under the rule of various Muslim authorities. No matter how intermitted these persecutions occurred, they created a strong historical mentality of vulnerability which still has an impact on the current political system. Despite commands for tolerance against *dhimmis* described above, the rule of Caliph Umar was not always a positive experience for Christians. The Caliph's agreement with the Christians of Jerusalem – often described as the 'Pact of Umar' – would be a curious departure from Muhammad's Constitution of Medina and would leave a comparatively stricter legacy for how Muslims should treat Christians. The Pact discussed how Christians had to refrain from speaking against Islam as well as from publicly proselytizing their religion. Crosses, public processions and the ringing of church bells was also discouraged in this agreement, essentially turning Christian worship into a private activity only. These rules also set specific dress for non-Muslims and stipulated that they would have to ride donkeys or mules, not horses.<sup>263</sup> The building of new churches became extremely difficult as well, a trend that would become a significant problem for the Coptic Christians in Egypt right up to the modern era.<sup>264</sup> According to Robert Brenton Betts, "the dhimmis system, while allowing the Heterodox Christians to keep their religion, churches, and property, and to live according to the cannon laws of their particular sect, condemned them in effect to a slow but almost inevitable decline and death."<sup>265</sup> Put precisely, although the Coptic Church was freed from direct persecution from the Roman Empire and allowed to pursue whatever beliefs

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<sup>263</sup> Bruce Masters, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman World: The Roots of Sectarianism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>264</sup> Fletcher, 21.

<sup>265</sup> Betts, 9.

it wished, the *dhimmis* system would weaken the Church in the long term, first by removing it from the greater Christian world and by undermining its ability to spread. At the same time, the *dhimmis* system resulted in realities which favoured conversion to Islam, a trend that would increase over time. As more and more Arabs moved into Egypt, they intermarried with the Coptic population, slowly transforming the society linguistically and religiously.<sup>266</sup>

Not surprisingly, violence broke out as the reality of the *dhimmis* system set in, especially when various Muslim rulers moved away from the strict guidelines set down by Muhammad's teachings. This was the case during the rule of Caliph Yazid, whose efforts to remove Christian icons from Egypt resulted in a massive revolt against the *dhimmis* system in the mid-eight century A.D. Other riots would eventually break out over taxation, each brutally suppressed.<sup>267</sup> In the Nile Delta, no less than three full scale revolts took place between 722 and 767 AD. In the south, where the Christian population was concentrated, a major insurrection broke out in 782 AD. A final revolt would be organized in 829 near the city of Hawf, and, like the previous rebellions, Muslim retaliation was swift and brutal.<sup>268</sup> This is significant, because moments of intolerance would act as a formative experience for internalized norms held by both the Coptic Christians and Muslims.

The Fatmid Dynasty would, for the most part, pursued a policy encouraging a tolerant relationship with the Coptic Christian community. There is however, the notable exception of the Caliph al-Hakim, who would, between 1012 and 1015, introduce

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<sup>266</sup> Vatikiotis, 14.

<sup>267</sup> Christian Cannuyer, Coptic Egypt: The Christians of the Nile (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2001), 65.

<sup>268</sup> Chitham, 57.

widespread persecution towards Coptic Christians and expel them from official positions.<sup>269</sup> Claiming he was a divine manifestation of God<sup>270</sup>, Hakim ordered all Christians to be forced to wear a five pound cross around their necks (which often lead to serious strain and injuries), wear dark clothes and be tattooed.<sup>271</sup> Reviving the Pact of Umar, Coptic Christians were again forced to only ride donkeys<sup>272</sup> and many escaped into the country's rural areas as the Caliph ordered the destruction of over three thousand churches.<sup>273</sup> Although al-Hakim is largely viewed by scholars as an anomaly (evidence points to him being clinically insane<sup>274</sup>), his actions serve as further evidence that not all Islamic rulers would follow the theoretically liberal guidelines set down by Muhammad and the early Muslims towards the *dhimmis*.

The Mamluk Sultanate would however, provide a sustained example of Muslim persecution towards Coptic Christians. Riots, encouraged by virulent anti-Christian rhetoric would push the sectarian tensions in Egypt to the limit.<sup>275</sup> Much of this animosity would stem from suspicion the Sultanate had over Christian loyalty during the Crusades.<sup>276</sup> Period literature began to criticize Christians who “assume a proud bearing”, with one preacher describing Coptic Christians as “the source of all misfortune and treason.”<sup>277</sup> Later, stories emerged about how Christians in Syria sprinkled Muslims with wine after the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Mongol conquest of Baghdad, while chanting the

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<sup>269</sup> Meinardus, 65.

<sup>270</sup> Barbara Watterson, *Coptic Egypt* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 156.

<sup>271</sup> Informal Interview with Thomas Emad, Coptic Lawyer. (Sharm al-Shaykh, Egypt, 16 September 2005).

<sup>272</sup> Wakin, 43.

<sup>273</sup> Jill Kamil, *Christianity in the Land of the Pharaohs: The Coptic Orthodox Church*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243.

<sup>274</sup> Watterson, 156.

<sup>275</sup> Masters, 24.

<sup>276</sup> Van Doorn Harder and Vogt, 153.

<sup>277</sup> M. Pealman, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamluk Empire,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1942): 849-850.

supremacy of Christ.<sup>278</sup> Under these conditions, simple actions by Christians, including church repairs, would result in significant discontent amongst Egyptian Muslims. Evidence shows that, on one occasion, the promotion of Christian scribes by the Sultan resulted in widespread riots and the destruction of churches in both Cairo and Alexandria. In response to the violence, the Sultan doubled the required *jizya* tax that year.<sup>279</sup>

During the Bahri Mamluk era, there are several examples periods of sustained campaigns against the *dhimmis*. One campaign, in 1293 A.D., began when Muslims observed a Christian leading a Muslim debtor around the city by a rope. In response, the Sultan removed all Christians from his service and ordered churches and Christian homes to be attacked and looted.<sup>280</sup> Ten years later, the Sultan Nasir Muhammad began to persecute Christians because an ambassador from the Maghrib (present day Morocco) was alarmed at how proud the Coptic Christians were during his tour of Cairo. In his land, he argued, Christians “suffer extreme misery and degradation”. Immediately, new laws were passed forcing Christians to wear distinct clothing, once more ride only donkeys, and be forbidden to repair churches. Worst of all, sectarian relations were dealt another blow by laws which made fraternizing illegal between Christians and Muslims.<sup>281</sup> Even Copts that converted were subject to continual discrimination, as the Muslim community argued their conversion was due entirely upon a desire for power.<sup>282</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Christian payment of the *jizyah* would evolve into a highly public lesson in humiliation.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Pealman, 850.

<sup>279</sup> Pealman, 562-569.

<sup>280</sup> Donald P. Little, “Coptic Conversion to Islam under Bahri Mamluks,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies Vol. 39. No. 3 (1976): 554.

<sup>281</sup> Little, 555-556.

<sup>282</sup> Pealman, 858.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 860.

The period between the French invasion under Napoleon and the 1952 Revolution was a mixed period for the Coptic Christians. Contrary to expectations, it was the Egyptians themselves that began to increasingly demand Coptic participation in the bureaucracy, eventually passing laws declaring non-Muslims as full citizens. Colonial regimes, as shall be demonstrated in the following section, largely exacerbated sectarian tensions and hostility against the Copts.

The landing of French forces in Egypt in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century increased Muslim suspicion of the Copts just as it had during the period of the Crusades. Many within the Ottoman Empire argued that the Coptic Christians should be killed for presenting a “fifth column” in the Empire.<sup>284</sup> This mentality was only eased after significant efforts were taken to demonstrate the French were not invading under the auspices of Christianity.

Christian participation would increase under Muhammad Ali and his descendants, who, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, began to shift towards the political environment towards an Egyptian national identity which transcended religion.<sup>285</sup> Ali would push to take advantage of Coptic Christian bureaucrats and advisors, while his descendants abolished the *jizyah* and allowed non-Muslims to join the army.<sup>286</sup> Granting Christians prestigious positions remained controversial, even precarious at first, as traditionally these positions were given to Muslims.<sup>287</sup> The Khedives could carry out these reforms however, because they held on to the legitimacy of being the first truly Egyptian rulers since antiquity.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Meinardus, 66.

<sup>285</sup> Muhammad Ali was originally the regional authority placed in charge of Egypt by the Ottoman Sultanate, before increasingly pushing for autonomy from the Empire.

<sup>286</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 10, 24.

<sup>287</sup> Hasan, 33-34.

<sup>288</sup> The regional rulers of Egypt, which gained considerable autonomy after the reign of Muhammad Ali. Although Muhammad Ali and most of Egypt's elite were not native to the country, Ali would work tirelessly to portray himself as an Egyptian, rather than Ottoman ruler.

For the first time in centuries, the Christians of Egypt were removed from the *dhimmis* system and its ideological descendants and free to participate in mainstream politics.

Later, under the British, Copts were once again faced with discrimination. The British were acutely aware of the fact that the Coptic Christians were again being called collaborators with a foreign power, and countered the rise of animosity by not placing Christians in prominent positions.<sup>289</sup> In fact, British efforts to assure Muslims the best positions in the bureaucracy led Copts to form protests councils, such as the one held in Asyut in 1910. Their complaints included the desire to have Sunday made a holiday and the opening of more positions to Christians, including more seats on provisional councils.<sup>290</sup> Eventually, frustration with British rule would lead to Copts joining with Muslims in nationalist movements committed to put “Egypt First”.<sup>291</sup> Participation with secular nationalist parties like the *Wafd* saw Coptic Christians enjoy increasing representation in the National Assembly (including elections in 1924, 1928, 1936 and 1942).<sup>292</sup>

A new sense of vulnerability would be created however with the growth of Islamist movements in Egypt. Tensions had already begun to mount over the perception of Coptic control in the *Wafd* movement. This was encouraged by the rhetoric of opposition political parties like the Liberal Constitutionalists who began to attack the *Wafd* using religion. Although secular nationalists as well, the Liberal Constitutionalists argued that the *Wafd* was trying to hide the fact that it was a Coptic Christian party from the Muslim populace. Drawing off Nazi propaganda, the Liberal Constitutionalists

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<sup>289</sup> Hasan, 35.

<sup>290</sup> Meinardus, 75.

<sup>291</sup> Vatikiotis, 208.

<sup>292</sup> Hasan, 40.



would use the same rhetoric that Hitler used against the Jews to weaken the *Wafd* and their Christian supporters.<sup>293</sup> Arguments that the Coptic Christians were trying to create their own state increased pressures for the *Wafd* separate itself from Christian support. This was heightened as attacks against churches began to intensify in 1946.<sup>294</sup>

The ideal of a joint secular Egyptian identity was also strained by the pressure of Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood. Arguing a full return to the tenets of an Islamic state, al-Banna described how “Voices are raised proclaiming the necessity to return to these [Islamic] principles, teachings and ways of Islam...for initiating the reconciliation of modern life with these principles, as a prelude to final ‘Islamization’”.<sup>295</sup> Al-Banna called for the return to Islamic *shari’ah* as the basis for Egyptian law and described how secularization was the root cause of weakening in the Arab world.<sup>296</sup> Not surprisingly, Egyptian Christians reacted to this development with a great deal of suspicion, fearing that revived Islamist political groups would push towards a new Pact of Umar and a neo-*dhimmi* system.<sup>297</sup> That said, throughout his lifetime, al-Banna argued that Christians would remain full citizens of an Islamic state, and even included a Copt on his Bureau of Muslim Brothers.<sup>298</sup> This concept of tolerance remains the official line of the Muslim Brotherhood to this day, which, according to senior party member Essam al-Erien, is committed to opening up a “political space” for Christians within the Egyptian state.<sup>299</sup> In fact, an entire section of the Brotherhood’s ‘Reform Initiative’ which was

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<sup>293</sup> Hasan, 49.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 50, 53.

<sup>295</sup> John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52.

<sup>296</sup> Esposito, *Unholy War*, 52.

<sup>297</sup> Masters, 186.

<sup>298</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 26.

<sup>299</sup> Informal interview with Essam al-Erien, senior spokesperson for the Muslim Brotherhood. (Cairo, Egypt, 14 December 2005).

released during the 2005 elections dealt with relations with their “Coptic Brothers”, and lists the following principles:

- i) Copts are a part of the fabric of the Egyptian society. They are partners of the nation and destiny. Our rights are theirs, our duties are theirs.
- ii) Freedom of belief and worship for all is respected. Cooperation that serves the society and is in the best interest of citizens is an obligation for all.
- iii) Keenness on the brotherhood spirit that has been linking all Egyptians (Muslims and Copts) for centuries, spreading the foundations of love and harmony among them, so as to enable the nation to work comprehensively for building the future.
- iv) Emphasising national unity, not allowing any activity that leads to inciting feelings of religious sedition or ethnic fanaticism among Egyptians.<sup>300</sup>

Despite these positive ideologies, it is important to remember that mentalities of vulnerability can develop over what is perceived to be a threat, even if in reality that threat is not legitimately there. That said, the concern by Christians over Islamist movements is not entirely irrational. This is largely due to divisions which existed in Islamists movement from the beginning. Although al-Banna believed Coptic Christians should have full citizenship, Sayyid Qutb and other more radical brothers disagreed strongly.<sup>301</sup> Early in the group’s development, popular slogans included “Our Religion and not Two Religions/No Cross After Now!”, while others alluded to the anti-Zionist movements being a prelude to an assault on Christianity, “Today is Saturday/ Tomorrow is Sunday”.<sup>302</sup> Brotherhood criticism of Copts also targeted their assumed connection to colonial authorities, often saying foreign influences had corrupted the Christian

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<sup>300</sup> Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood Initiative: On the General Principles of Reform in Egypt (Cairo: The Muslim Brotherhood, 2005), 32.

<sup>301</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 32.

<sup>302</sup> Wakin 73.

community.<sup>303</sup> Although it can be argued that the party does not control all of its members, it is reasonable to assume that they alone would shape the message being presented in their official newspaper *al-Dawah*. Unfortunately, this too has often been highly inflammatory towards Coptic Christians, especially during the 1970s.<sup>304</sup> During this period, *al-Dawah* described Egypt as a paradise for Coptic Christians, placing blame for sectarian violence on Pope Shenuda. The paper routinely accused the patriarch of undermining Egyptian solidarity, included culling “militant monks” and the constant use of aid from foreign elements that sought to interfere in the country’s domestic affairs.<sup>305</sup>

Extremist off-shoots of the Brotherhood have made the situation even more problematic and inflammatory. Although the mainstream Brotherhood does not believe in the use of violence towards revolutionary Islamization, others, like *Tanzim al-Jihad*, have pushed to overthrow the government with a radical Islamic regime. These groups are extremely hostile to the Coptic Christians, and argue their traditional protected status under the *dhimmis* system has been withdrawn because of their efforts to undermine a return to an Islamic state. This and other Islamist extremist groups maintain that along with communists and Zionists, Christians in Egypt must all be killed.<sup>306</sup>

In response to the perceived Islamist threat and the monopolization of political power under Nasser after the Revolution, the Coptic community began to organize around insular institutions created by the Church. Although the specifics of this movement will be discussed in the following chapter, the following paragraphs will

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<sup>303</sup> Watterson, 175.

<sup>304</sup> Hasan, 107.

<sup>305</sup> Alberto M. Fernandez, *In the Year of the Martyr: Anti-Coptic Violence in Egypt 1988-1993* (San Francisco: Middle East Studies Association 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, 2001), 2.

<sup>306</sup> Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. The State* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 78.

outline President Sadat's response to what was perceived as a threat to presidential authority. Sadat's policies maximized the Coptic mentality of vulnerability and would represent, according to this study, a key factor for the later establishment of a clientelist relationship under President Mubarak.

Sadat maximized Coptic vulnerability in several ways. First, as mentioned previously, successful efforts were made to pass constitutional amendments to make *shari'ah* law the foundation for the state's legal code. In 1971, this resulted in Clause Two being changed to read that "Islam is the religion of the state" and that *shari'ah* was "a principle" source of legislation. By 1980, this was again amended, this time to describe *shari'ah* as "the principle" source of legislation.<sup>307</sup> This resulted in a series of efforts throughout the 1970s in which the Egyptian legislature debated over how to codify *shari'ah* into law.<sup>308</sup> In response to Coptic Christians' uproar about the renewed emphasis on religion, Sadat responded in his famous speech that all Egyptians should realize he is the "Muslim President of an Islamic State".<sup>309</sup>

The second way in which Sadat contributed to Christian perceptions of vulnerability was to support various Islamists groups, even when they openly described the Coptic Christians as being an impediment to the creation of an Islamic state.<sup>310</sup> Groups were now allowed to organize and infiltrate Egyptian universities, gaining the support of a new generation of youth. Islamist programming eventually became a major segment on Egyptian television (while Copts were limited to a broadcast on Easter) as discriminatory passages began to appear in the official school curriculum arguing that

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<sup>307</sup> Zubaida, 166.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>309</sup> Michael Curtis, Religion and Politics in the Middle East (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 86.

<sup>310</sup> Hasan, 106.

Islam is a superior religion.<sup>311</sup> Perhaps most disturbingly, increasing evidence began to mount to suggest the public school system was tacitly encouraging Christian students to convert religions.<sup>312</sup>

The third factor in Sadat's move to challenge the Church came from his unwarranted rhetoric of the Coptic clergy representing a separatist movement within Egypt. Rhetoric of Christians mobilizing to break away in Asyut or Alexandria became popular, as well as ideas that monks were stockpiling weapons in monasteries.<sup>313</sup> Sadat himself argued in a speech in 1980 that the Pope was turning his community into a "fifth column". One year later, in front of the National Assembly, Sadat described how Christians were working with Lebanese Phalange and taking money from West Germany to violently create their own state.<sup>314</sup> Attacks on Coptic Christians that followed were ignored by the President, who continually blamed outsiders for terrorism. In one case in 1980, attacks on several churches in the country were blamed on an "Iranian spy".<sup>315</sup> Finally, in an act meant clearly to instill a sense of vulnerability in the Church, Sadat placed Pope Shenuda and over 170 clergy under house arrest. Pope Shenuda would remain in custody until he was released by President Mubarak in 1985.<sup>316</sup>

The mentality of vulnerability was also greatly enhanced by extremist violence which targeted Christians during Sadat's presidency. Repeated attacks against the Coptic Christian community began increasing in frequency during the debate over placing *shari'ah* in the constitution began in 1971. For example, only a year after the amendment

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 171,173.

<sup>312</sup> Informal interview with Negad al-Borai, Director of the Group for Democratic Development. (Cairo, Egypt, 12 December 2005).

<sup>313</sup> Solihin, 75-77.

<sup>314</sup> Hasan, 115-116.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 113.

was passed, a Coptic church was stoned, then set ablaze after Muslims learned of a priest whose healing “miracles” had convinced over three hundred Egyptians to convert to Christianity.<sup>317</sup> In November 1972, fighting broke out in the village of Khanka (near Cairo), over plans to use a private home as a chapel. By the end of the skirmish, the building in which the chapel was planned had been completely razed to the ground. Clergy sent by the Church to investigate the incident started more riots, resulting in Christian shops and homes being looted throughout the village.<sup>318</sup> 1977 saw a priest murdered by Muslims in the town of Tewfikya, while 1978-79 would see the Church of Abu Zaabal (Cairo) and the historic Church of the Virgin (al-Damshriyya) burned down by arsonists.<sup>319</sup> 1980 saw a significant wave of Church burnings in Minya and Firkria as well as a bombing campaign against Christian sites across the country (particularly Alexandria).<sup>320</sup> Finally, in 1981, Muslim protests over a proposed Church resulted in the murder of Christians in Zawya al-Hamra.<sup>321</sup>

Under President Hosni Mubarak, the shift to the system of a more balanced vulnerability described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter is seen to develop. This of course, is necessary in order to maintain a mentality which supports the continuation of the clientelist relationship with the clergy that formed during his presidency. It is clear however that after two decades of Mubarak’s rule, the hostile rhetoric which existed between the ruling party and the Coptic Church is no longer present. That said, according to Gasser Abdel-Razek of the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, concrete positive human rights reforms have been largely superficial (such as the

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<sup>317</sup> Curtis, 83.

<sup>318</sup> Hasan, 106.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 108. 115.

<sup>321</sup> Shatzmiller, 27.

declaration of Coptic Christmas as a holiday) while substantial reforms are delayed (particularly the Church Permit Law which remains based on a 140 year old Ottoman Decree that demands the Coptic Church to get government permission to build or repair a church).<sup>322</sup> Although the government had officially ceased directed criticism of the Coptic Christians, it has not moved to eliminate the roots of intolerance themselves.<sup>323</sup>

Moreover, although the personal relationship between President Mubarak and Pope Shenuda has improved greatly, little serious effort has been made to heal the mentality of vulnerability which grew greatly under Sadat.<sup>324</sup> Coptic Christians remain marginalized in Egyptian politics, with low representation in parliament, cabinet, university administrations and governorships.<sup>325</sup> Even discrimination in the media (TV, movies) as well as within the school curriculum have remained.<sup>326</sup> One example of this was a television serial or *musalsal* which was aired in February 1990. Based on sensationalized reports of Copts running pornography/drug rings with Muslim women (reports that were eventually proven to be invented by a 19 year old Muslim girl after being discovered in a relationship with a Coptic man), this serial would inspire violence to break out in Upper Egypt.<sup>327</sup>

Under Mubarak (though without the support that was seen during Sadat), Islamist parties and organizations quickly monopolized student unions and organizations on

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<sup>322</sup> Informal interview with Gasser Abdel-Razek, senior member of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. (Cairo, Egypt, 30 October 2005).

<sup>323</sup> Informal interview with Ahmed Samih, Director of the Al-Andalus Center for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies. (Cairo, Egypt, 14 November 2005).

<sup>324</sup> Ahmed Samih, interview.

<sup>325</sup> Amber Neumann, Interview with Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center. (Cairo, Egypt, 29 November 2005).

<sup>326</sup> Negad al-Borai, interview.

<sup>327</sup> Fernandez, 5-6.

several university campuses.<sup>328</sup> Islamic NGOs, pursuing a message of social justice, moved to monopolize Egyptian civil society, and now represent over eight thousand of the country's fourteen thousand volunteer organizations.<sup>329</sup> Islamist groups have thoroughly infiltrated the education system, causing the Minister of Education to report in 1994 that students were being taught "not to salute the flag, sing the national anthem or talk or study with Christian students".<sup>330</sup> Professional syndicates have also been dominated by Islamist groups during the 1990s, despite intensive government attempts to interfere. In 1992, groups calling themselves the "Islamic Trend" and "Islamic Voice" won control over the Lawyer's Syndicate and the Doctor's Syndicate. In the case of the later, Islamists won seventy-two percent of the vote despite the fact that the Doctor's Syndicate has a heavy Coptic Christian presence.<sup>331</sup> Other syndicates controlled by the Islamists include the Pharmacists, Scientists and Engineer's Guild.<sup>332</sup>

Although most of these Islamist groups were peaceful and have extended recognition of Coptic Christian presence in Egypt, extremists have continued to attack Christians in the name of religion. Islamist militant groups have often robbed Coptic businessmen in order to finance their operations, while in 1992, reports surfaced of Muslims in the town of Manshiet Nasr who were forcing their Christian neighbours to pay them *jizyah*.<sup>333</sup> In 1995, thirteen Copts were murdered during mass at the St. George Church in Abu Korkas.<sup>334</sup> Two years later, violence claimed the lives of fourteen Copts

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<sup>328</sup> Wickham, 2.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 178-186.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>333</sup> Fernandez, 9, 14.

<sup>334</sup> Hasan, 22.



in Bahgoura.<sup>335</sup> In 1998, in the village of al-Kosheh, two Christians were beaten to death in a brawl. Perhaps more significant, attempts by newspapers like *al-Watani* and human rights groups to investigate the incident were frustrated by the government.<sup>336</sup> In 2000, violence flared once more in al-Kosheh, with twenty-two people killed in a riot involving shooting from both Christians and Muslims.<sup>337</sup> The basis of the violence was a simple argument between a Christian trader and a Muslim shopper which eventually lead to riots that lasted for over forty-eight hours.<sup>338</sup>

Sectarian violence would again break out in the city of Alexandria in October 2005 in response to a play being released on DVD which made several offensive statements about Islam. Encouraged by inflammatory articles in the *al-Osbo* newspaper, a Muslim youth stabbed a nun, Sarah Rushdie Sidhum Mikhail, for allegedly selling the DVD.<sup>339</sup> After Friday prayers, a crowd of over three thousand Muslims began to attack Christian churches and businesses, as well as state security personnel.<sup>340</sup> After the violence had settled, four churches in Alexandria were damaged, as well as numerous Christian businesses. Over sixty-three people were injured in the violence, including twenty-nine police officers.<sup>341</sup> The most recent violence occurred on April 14, 2006, when 25 year old Mahmoud Salah-Eddin Abdel-Raziq attacked worshipers in

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<sup>335</sup> Cannuyer, 109.

<sup>336</sup> David Aikman, "Egypt's Human Wrongs," *The American Spectator* Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 1999): 64.

<sup>337</sup> Cannuyer, 109.

<sup>338</sup> Kees Huban, "20 Christians Die as Village Tensions Flare," *Christianity Today* Vol. 44, No. 2 (2000), 31.

<sup>339</sup> The Al-Andalus Center for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies and the Group for Democratic Development. *Autumn of Hatred: Fact Finding Mission Report*. (Cairo: 2005), 4.

<sup>340</sup> Al-Andalus Center for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies, 4.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Alexandrian churches. The resulting deaths and injuries began sustained protest from Christians calling upon an end to Coptic persecution.<sup>342</sup>

It is important to note that the state no longer engages in the inflammatory language that was prevalent during the presidency of Anwar Sadat. On the contrary, a sustained rhetoric of national unity has been a key foundation of the Mubarak era. This can be seen in symbolic gestures, such as the President's son Gamal Mubarak attending Pope Shenuda's Christmas mass in 2003, the same year the celebration became recognized as a national holiday.<sup>343</sup> Extremist attacks are responded to very seriously by state security forces, but little is done to comprehensively remove the root source of sectarian tensions. According to S. S. Hasan, the state is very careful not to eliminate Islamist groups, opting instead to contain and control them.<sup>344</sup> This would represent a relationship that would not be unlike that which exists between the state and the Coptic Orthodox Church. In both cases, a balance has been created by which a level of vulnerability is maintained to promote a system which favours Mubarak's supremacy.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> "Coptic Church Attack Sparks Anger," BBC News Online 15 April 2006; accessed 16 April 2006; available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4911346.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4911346.stm).

<sup>343</sup> "Egypt marks Copts' Christmas," BBC News Online 7 January 2003; accessed 7 July 2006; available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/2635341.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2635341.stm).

<sup>344</sup> Hasan, 264.

<sup>345</sup> Negad al-Borai, interview.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF CLERICAL AUTHORITY AND MECHANISMS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY

The previous chapters have focused mainly on the political environment in which the Coptic Orthodox Church finds itself. In order to outline the patron-client relationship between the clergy and the regime however, discussion must shift to describe the dynamics of the Orthodox Christian community itself. Chapter Two described patron-client relationships generally as an exchange between two actors. In order for such a relationship to exist, the Coptic community would need a significant level of communal solidarity under a single authority. This is not always the case with sectarian groups, as communities often can have competing authorities each trying to lead at a national level.<sup>346</sup> High levels of factionalism, not surprisingly, often destabilize any attempt at a systemic patron-client arrangement. The question therefore is whether Egyptian Christians represent a unified community, and if so, is this community unified under the Orthodox Church as previously suggested.

The premise of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate the mechanisms with which the Orthodox Church uses to maintain communal solidarity under its authority. The Church's position as communal patron has not gone unchallenged, as secular groups and other Christian denominations exist within Egypt, disrupting Coptic clerical control. The foundation of clerical power, not surprisingly, depends partly on ideologies which place religious concerns over secular-political ones. Put another way, the power of the Orthodox Church depends on a Coptic identity which is religiously active and politically apathetical. The specific need for this political apathy will be fully explained when the

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<sup>346</sup> Schmidt, et al., 135.

patron-client relationship with the regime is outlined in Chapter Six. This chapter however, will simply attempt to demonstrate that the Orthodox Church pressures its community to avoid participation in mainstream political life.

In order to achieve this apathy, the Orthodox Church relies on theological traditions which it uses as an ideological base to urge Coptic Christians not to engage in secular political life. These ideologies all promote a denial of material concerns for concentration on spiritual sacrifice and religious activities.

Concepts of political apathy are also based on historical mentalities of exceptionalism and victimization within the Coptic community, identities which have been emphasized in order to justify ideologies of political apathy. The combination of these historical mentalities and the theological beliefs described above therefore create a powerful motivation for religious activities outside of the mainstream political sphere. Therefore, an in-depth examination of both will monopolize the first section of this chapter. The second section will focus on how these ideologies, and, more importantly, the Orthodox Church itself was able to regain control of the Coptic community during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### *Roman and Byzantine Persecution of Coptic Christians*

The roots of the above mentioned mentalities are in many ways linked to the feeling of vulnerability discussed in Chapter Four. These perceptions pre-date Islam however, and can be traced to the rise of Christianity in Egypt itself. Legend describes how the apostle St. Mark journeyed into Africa to establish the Holy See of Alexandria on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 68 AD.<sup>347</sup> He would establish an unbroken line of 117 patriarchs which

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<sup>347</sup> Meinardus, 28.

would lead up to the current Coptic pontiff.<sup>348</sup> In reality the history of Christianity's influx into Egypt is slightly more complex. Historical information on the apostles of Jesus by and large does not exist, meaning there is no actual evidence to support the narrative that St. Mark brought Christianity to the region.<sup>349</sup> In fact, almost no concrete information on the Christian community of Egypt exists before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD.<sup>350</sup> Historians believe however, that the movement began within the Hellenistic Jewish community of Alexandria.<sup>351</sup> Roman authorities certainly considered early Christians to be a Jewish cult, and evidence exists to demonstrate the community was subject to anti-Jewish laws of the period.<sup>352</sup> These laws included orders to immediately execute people found to not worship pagan gods as well as edicts which made proselytizing a crime for Jews.<sup>353</sup> Jewish persecution was nothing new in the Empire, but was growing steadily during the first century A.D., with a massacre by Tiberius Julius Alexander in the year 66 and the widespread violence which accompanied the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem four years later.<sup>354</sup> Under the Emperor Trajan, Jewish revolts in 115 A.D. lead to a retaliation so severe that it almost eliminated the community in Egypt entirely.<sup>355</sup>

Christian separation from Judaism likely began in the second century A.D. and would take almost three hundred years to complete.<sup>356</sup> Ironically, this process was most likely aided by the weakening of Jewish orthodox influence teachings under Roman

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>349</sup> Florence D. Friedman, Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D (Rhode Island: Rhode Island School of Design, 1989), 41.

<sup>350</sup> Birger A. Pearson, Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 12.

<sup>351</sup> Friedman, 41 and Pearson, 15.

<sup>352</sup> Watterson, 24.

<sup>353</sup> Watterson, 21 and 202.

<sup>354</sup> Pearson, 83.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 88.

persecution.<sup>357</sup> This does not mean however, that persecution from pagan Roman authorities would cease to target Christians.<sup>358</sup> In fact, evidence points to Egypt being a major centre for pagan imperial violence against Christians.<sup>359</sup> Some of the first waves of persecution were ordered by the Emperor Decius, but these were soon surpassed by the unprecedented attacks carried out under the reign of Diocletian. During this period, hundreds of churches were razed, with their congregations enslaved, imprisoned and tortured.<sup>360</sup> Tens of thousands were killed for their Christian beliefs during this period<sup>361</sup>, which is still remembered as the “era of the martyrs”.<sup>362</sup>

Eventually persecution would end under Constantine, and the Church of Alexandria would be allowed to establish itself as a mainstream religious centre. The Coptic Church had already organized itself as an autonomous organization under its first historically verifiable patriarch, St. Demetrius (circa. 125 AD).<sup>363</sup> Under his administration, a college of elders (presbyters) was created in order to unify Christians within Egypt.<sup>364</sup> This *presbyteroi* would also select the various bishops (*episcopus*) in Egypt, including the Patriarch of Alexandria.<sup>365</sup> As the power of the Egyptian Church expanded, it began to produce some of the great minds of early Christianity, including Titus Flavius Clement (160-215 A.D.) and his pupil Origen.<sup>366</sup> In fact, Alexandria would become increasingly important in the development of Christian theology until infighting

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<sup>357</sup> Cannayuyer, 20.

<sup>358</sup> Mordechai Nisan, Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2002), 135.

<sup>359</sup> Cannuyer, 26.

<sup>360</sup> Watterson, 31-33.

<sup>361</sup> Friedman, 42.

<sup>362</sup> Cannauyer, 26.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>364</sup> Pearson, 16.

<sup>365</sup> Cannauyer, 19.

<sup>366</sup> Hasan, 24.

and internal schisms began.<sup>367</sup> Within a short time, Egyptian Christianity would again be persecuted and forced out the mainstream, only this time, the violence would be carried out by other Christians.

In order to understand the next wave of persecutions against Egyptian Christianity, it is necessary to briefly discuss various Christological arguments that would develop during the reign of Constantine and his successors. As pagan persecution ended and various Christian churches were allowed to become mainstream, debate began over the plurality of interpretations which existed at the time. Christology, simply the study of the nature of Christ, was one of the main points of contention. Questions over what the term “Son of God” and “Son of Man” actually meant with regards to Christian belief were considered extremely important.<sup>368</sup>

One of the most prominent Christological movements which would later be declared heretical by the Roman Empire was Arianism. Founded by the North African theologian Arius (256-336 A.D.), the movement described Christ as existentially less divine than the Father.<sup>369</sup> This meant that Christ and the Father were not of the same substance and that a clear hierarchy existed between them. Other theologians, like Nestorius (386-451 AD) believed that Christ was two distinct persons, one wholly divine, and one wholly human.<sup>370</sup> Another opinion was held by Eutyches (380-456 A.D.), a monk from Constantinople who argued both of Christ’s natures were divine and that his material body was not that of a normal man.<sup>371</sup> It is interesting to note that all of these

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<sup>367</sup> Watterson, 36.

<sup>368</sup> Fletcher, 4.

<sup>369</sup> Friedman, 42.

<sup>370</sup> Watterson, 42.

<sup>371</sup> Fouad Guirguis, The Difficult Years of Survival: A Short History of the Coptic Church (New York: Vintage Press, 1985), 9.

opinions were eventually considered heretical by the Imperial Church. The essential reason for this revolves around Orthodox understandings of the significance of Christ's resurrection. If Christ was not human and divine, it was argued, there would be no saving grace from his death and resurrection.<sup>372</sup> The Orthodox answer to this question would be largely decided at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) where a decision was made by assembled theologians that Jesus is both God and Man within a single substance (*homoousis*).<sup>373</sup>

The next wave of controversy would revolve around the nature of how Jesus' two essences interacted within the person of Christ, a debate which would result in a return to the brutal persecution of the Egyptian Church. The Egyptians (along with other Christian sects) believed in a theology of monophysitism, a philosophy which states that Christ's human and divine natures were completely fused into one essence through the mystery of the incarnation.<sup>374</sup> According to the current Coptic patriarch, Pope Shenuda III, "His humanity is one with His Divinity without commixture, without confusion, without division, without separation."<sup>375</sup> In other words, Christ was "one person from two persons".<sup>376</sup> The Imperial position at the Council of Chalcedon was only slightly different, that Christ had two essences which, although permanently united within one substance, remained unmixed.<sup>377</sup> It is difficult to imagine that such a small theological difference could lead to the brutal persecution of the Egyptian Church by Constantinople. Not surprisingly, there is also a much more earthly explanation for the rift which was to

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<sup>372</sup> Friedman, 35.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>374</sup> Meinardus, 53.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>376</sup> Wakin, 6.

<sup>377</sup> Meinardus, 53.



come. As mentioned above, the prominence of the See of Alexandria was unquestionable during this period, and rivalries had developed between its Patriarch and the Patriarch of the Imperial capital of Constantinople. Many historians argue that the Council of Chalcedon was simply an attempt to undermine Alexandria's power.<sup>378</sup> During this period, the most efficient way to undermine the Egyptian Church was to trap their Patriarch in heresy.<sup>379</sup>

Persecution of the Egyptian Church began swiftly. Imperial authorities handed over control of the See of Alexandria, despite serious riots amongst Egyptian Christians, to bishops who accepted the tenets of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>380</sup> These bishops would therefore form what would be called the "Melkite" or Imperial Church.<sup>381</sup> From this moment on, a distinct schism would be formed between Egyptian bishops loyal to Constantinople, and the majority of Egyptian clerics and believers who held a staunchly monophysite philosophy. To signal their independence, monophysite churches began to write in Coptic instead of Greek, in an attempt to demonstrate that they represented the true Egyptian Christianity.<sup>382</sup> Byzantine authorities, pushing to ensure adherence to orthodoxy, engaged in serious persecutions of the Egyptian monophysites, particularly under Emperor Leo (474) and Justinian (6<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.).<sup>383</sup> According to Aziz S. Atiya, "unbearable excessive taxation and the most horrible torture and humiliation were inflicted upon the Christians throughout the period from 451 to 641 until the advent of

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<sup>378</sup> Guirguis, 36.

<sup>379</sup> Kyriakos Mikhail, Copts and Muslims Under British Control: A Collection of Facts and a Resume of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1911; reprint, 1971), 4.

<sup>380</sup> Guirguis, 38.

<sup>381</sup> Mikhail, 5.

<sup>382</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 36.

<sup>383</sup> Watterson, 47.

the Arabs on the scene.”<sup>384</sup> That said, monophysite Christianity did not disappear, but instead became an expression of Egyptian national pride in the face of foreign Christian authorities.<sup>385</sup>

The goal of the above discussion was to demonstrate that since its very creation and with little exception, Egyptian Christianity has existed outside of mainstream Christianity. This has created a historical mentality of separation, victimization and distinctiveness within the Egyptian Christian community which was been used to encourage Copts from involving themselves in modern mainstream politics. This insular identity is further exacerbated by ascetic ideologies which are a critical foundation of Egyptian Christian theology.

#### *Asceticism in Coptic Ideologies*

The earliest roots of ascetic philosophies in the Egyptian Church most likely derive from Gnostic cults which slowly replaced Judaism as the primary influence of Coptic Christians.<sup>386</sup> Integrated into Christianity by influential theologians like Valentinus (100-153 A.D.) and Basilides (117-138 A.D.)<sup>387</sup>, Gnosticism infused ascetic principles into Coptic Church which still continue today.

Gnostic beliefs represented a complex and diverse tradition, but in its most basic form, the movement argued that salvation for mankind could only be achieved through a *gnosis* (knowledge) of oneself.<sup>388</sup> The material body and lower primal emotions were not existentially part of the self, as ones real form was only the divine core of the soul.<sup>389</sup> In

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<sup>384</sup> Aziz S. Atiya, The Copts and Christian Civilization (Utah: University of Utah Press, 1979), 27.

<sup>385</sup> Watterson, 47.

<sup>386</sup> Cannuyer, 20.

<sup>387</sup> Pearson, 13.

<sup>388</sup> Guirguis, 202.

<sup>389</sup> Pearson, 97.

fact, Gnosticism argued that a person's divine and eternal soul was trapped by their material body, and salvation came from attempts to set the soul free.<sup>390</sup> Gnostic teachings were the only way that this escape could be accomplished.<sup>391</sup> Most often on a practical level, Gnostic practice advocated a denial of the material world and all bodily temptations.<sup>392</sup>

Gnostic philosophies overtime became deluded in Egypt by Christian influence over the centuries. Ascetic principles however, would live on in Coptic monasticism, another philosophy of self-denial and a rejection of the material world. The roots of Egyptian monastic movements pre-date Christianity as well, with historical evidence suggesting several groups existed before the birth of Christ. Many of these groups practiced similar ascetic philosophies as later Christian monks, suggesting a long-standing tradition in the region. Examples of pre-Christian monastic groups included the *Katachoi*, who lived in the catacombs of the ancient city of Memphis, as well as the *Gymnosophists*, a group which worshiped the Nile and abstained from meat and "passionate emotions". Other groups included the *Rapeutae*, a group localized around pharonic caves outside Alexandria who sought to heal their souls by purging it of desire.<sup>393</sup> These ascetic philosophies of finding solace within the desert would be again revived by Christians during the various phases of Roman persecution described above<sup>394</sup> and was arguably a social replacement for the glory of martyrdom.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Friedman, 48.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>392</sup> Cannuyer, 23.

<sup>393</sup> Watterson, 54-55.

<sup>394</sup> Cannuyer, 33.

<sup>395</sup> Friedman, 45.

The first Christian to practice monasticism is believed to be St. Anthony (d. 356 A.D.), who, inspired by the example of the apostles, sold all of his possessions to pursue the path of Christ.<sup>396</sup> He argued an ascetic life style was ordered by Christ in the Gospel of Luke (specifically, Chapter 18, Verse 22) and that all monks must give up pleasure to the body of any sort, including regular patterns of sleeping and substantive meals.<sup>397</sup> These ideas of *dahiya* (self-denial) were key to the life of an early Christian monk.<sup>398</sup> Although St. Anthony gathered a following around the town of Pispis,<sup>399</sup> he himself would choose to practise his ascetic monasticism in solitude.<sup>400</sup> The advent of coenobite or communal monasticism would derive later with Pachomius (d. 348 A.D.), who pushed for the creation of self sufficient community monasteries.<sup>401</sup> Pachomius also promoted ascetic principles, even advocating practices of self-mortification out of a principle of torturing the body to save the soul.<sup>402</sup> Men were not alone in these ascetic pursuits, as historical evidence demonstrates that female monks often wandered the deserts of Egypt “looking for God”.<sup>403</sup>

Coptic writings would celebrate this lifestyle of poverty and self-denial. For example, a famous homily written by St. Peter (Patriarch of Alexandria from 300-311 AD) called *On Riches* warned Christians not to glorify the material world. God, it argues, will avenge the poor against the rich.<sup>404</sup> The monastery also preformed an important role for lay Copts as well, often serving as shelters during persecution and

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<sup>396</sup> Watterson, 56.

<sup>397</sup> Cannuyer, 33.

<sup>398</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 61.

<sup>399</sup> Waterrson, 59.

<sup>400</sup> Atiya, 11.

<sup>401</sup> Cragg, 176.

<sup>402</sup> Atiya, 12-13.

<sup>403</sup> Friedman, 45.

<sup>404</sup> Pearson, 119-120.

offering a sense of permanence for the community in the face of uncertainty.<sup>405</sup> Monastic leaders would join famous martyrs of the faith and other “legendary folk heroes” as a symbol of Coptic identity and the foundation for a broader communal framework.<sup>406</sup>

The significance of the monastery today is no less apparent. Although the revival of the Coptic Church will be discussed in the second section of this chapter, it is important to understand the role of monasticism in the modern Egyptian community. As mentioned above, Copts take extreme pride in the history of their monasteries, which were the first to appear in Christendom.<sup>407</sup> Today, the monastery is considered an “eternal source of religion” and place where God “touches humanity”.<sup>408</sup> The monks themselves are seen as the very elite of the Coptic Church,<sup>409</sup> and their numbers have grown substantially during the Twentieth Century. Estimates show that from 1970 to 1997, the number of monks in the Coptic Church has increased from two hundred to over eleven hundred, and the number of nuns from under two hundred to almost eight hundred.<sup>410</sup> Monks are highly educated and monasteries are increasingly attracting many within the Coptic professional elite.<sup>411</sup> Monasteries also serve an important practical role, increasingly serving as popular sites for baptisms and weddings amongst the Coptic youth.<sup>412</sup>

The most explicit ideological rejection of the material world is, of course, an adoration of martyrdom, a belief widely celebrated in Coptic theology. According to Christian Cannuyer, “to this day, Coptic spirituality and identity are imbued with the

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<sup>405</sup> Chitham, 65.

<sup>406</sup> Hasan, 4.

<sup>407</sup> Hasan, 4.

<sup>408</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 52.

<sup>409</sup> Wakin, 7.

<sup>410</sup> “The Church of the Martyrs,” *Christianity Today* Vol. 41 (August 1997): 44.

<sup>411</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 245.

<sup>412</sup> Hasan, 218.

memory of the men and women who died for their faith in the ancient world. Copts may even, at times, embrace a kind of obsession with martyrdom, exacerbating their conflicts...”<sup>413</sup> Coptic veneration of martyrs can be traced back to the earliest days of the Church, during the periods of intense persecution described above.<sup>414</sup> Egyptian Christian leaders argued that their communities should not fight or even flee their enemies, as this was not the example that Christ demonstrated.<sup>415</sup> Barbara Watterson describes that “many Christians deliberately sought martyrdom and rejoiced as they went to their deaths so that in modern eyes, it may seem that they were neurotic, if not masochistic...”<sup>416</sup>

Even with this intense zeal, the Christian community was seriously strained by the unprecedented persecution placed upon them during the reign of Diocletian. With more than 144,000 Christians estimated killed,<sup>417</sup> this period has been forever enshrined in the Coptic Christian mindset. In order to illustrate this, one has to look no further than the Coptic calendar, which begins in 284 A.D., the year Diocletian became Emperor and has the entire month of September dedicated to the Egyptian Christian martyrs of this period.<sup>418</sup> Even the calendar itself leaves no ambiguity, being named “the era of the martyrs”.<sup>419</sup>

The significance of the martyr in the Coptic community serves several purposes. According to one study, “martyrdom is an identity shaping tool used by communities seeking to distinguish itself from the other”.<sup>420</sup> Martyrdom also creates heroes which the

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<sup>413</sup> Cannuyer, 26.

<sup>414</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 121.

<sup>415</sup> Hasan, 94.

<sup>416</sup> Watterson, 22.

<sup>417</sup> Betts, 55.

<sup>418</sup> Hasan 22, 25.

<sup>419</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 124.

<sup>420</sup> Jason R. Zaborowski, The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijoit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth Century Egypt (Boston: Koninklijke Brill, 2005), 6.

Church can use to strengthen the community.<sup>421</sup> Some of the most famous Coptic martyrs are Apollonia (d. 249 A.D.), St. Michael the Sabaite (9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) and even St. Mark, the legendary founder of the Egyptian Church itself.<sup>422</sup> In recent times, studies have demonstrated that the Coptic Church has been heavily glorifying the idea of martyrdom.<sup>423</sup> In fact, during a sociological study by Nora Steen, a Coptic Sunday school teacher asked a class of four year olds if they were afraid to die as martyrs. The answer was a resounding and collective “NO!”<sup>424</sup> Even Coptic websites proudly display pictures of Egyptian Christians “martyrs” who were killed by Islamist violence in recent years.<sup>425</sup> According to Sameh Fawzy, a Coptic journalist with *al-Watani*, the re-emergence of martyr rhetoric was designed to shore up the community psychologically during Islamist militant violence under Sadat.<sup>426</sup> While this may have had some positive impact, George Ishak, director of the popular opposition group *Kifaya* argues that instead of focusing on making the world better, many Copts simply “dream of heaven.”<sup>427</sup>

Evidence also points to a sense of Coptic exceptionalism over the centuries, despite the fact that modern scholars argue that there are almost no ethnic, linguistic or cultural differences between Coptic Christians and Muslims.<sup>428</sup> In fact, research has shown that over ninety-percent of Egyptian Muslims have Coptic origins.<sup>429</sup> Both communities even share customs often thought to be purely Islamic, such as female

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<sup>421</sup> Nisan, 150.

<sup>422</sup> Watterson, 28, Zaborowski, 20, and Pearson, 102.

<sup>423</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 124.

<sup>424</sup> Shatzmiller, 41.

<sup>425</sup> “The Funeral Prayers and Biographies of the 21 Martyrs of al-Kosheh,” U.S. Copts Association (accessed 15 July 2006); available from <http://www.copts.net/photos.asp>.

<sup>426</sup> Informal interview with Sameh Fawzy, Coptic Journalist for *al-Watani*. (Cairo, Egypt, 17 October 2005).

<sup>427</sup> Informal interview with George Ishak, Head of the *Kifaya* Movement. (Cairo, Egypt, 14 December 2005).

<sup>428</sup> Chitham, 17 and Shatzmiller, 35.

<sup>429</sup> Chitham, 18 and Wakin, 5. Wakin’s estimate was slightly lower, at eighty-percent.

veiling.<sup>430</sup> In his famous quote, Lord Cromer describes a Copt as an Egyptian who prays in a church, while a Muslim was an Egyptian who prays in a mosque.<sup>431</sup> Despite the overwhelming evidence however, there still is a sense amongst Christians that they are the purest descendants of the ancient Egyptians.<sup>432</sup> This belief is not a recent development, but is in fact, centuries old. One of the earliest and most vivid examples of this mentality can be found in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Coptic manuscript *The Martyrdom of John of Phaijoit*. The story of an Egyptian Christian who converts to Islam only to be martyred for wishing to return to Christianity, the manuscript sheds incredible insight into ideals of Christian exceptionalism. Arguing that Muslims in Egypt were Arabs and not pharonic Egyptians, the story discusses intermarriage as polluting to the Coptic community.<sup>433</sup> Christians therefore were warned to avoid Islam's "sexual traps".<sup>434</sup> John's martyrdom at the end of the tale is described as spiritual purification for the sin of conversion.<sup>435</sup> This belief continued well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as Kyriakos Mikhail writings on the Copts in Egypt demonstrate. He describes Muslims as Arabs and states that Christians are the only true Egyptians.<sup>436</sup> Coptic Christians have kept their blood pure of "semi-barbarous Arabs and savage Kurds".<sup>437</sup> Christians who converted to Islam intermixed and were no longer purely Egyptian.<sup>438</sup> Muslims would forever be "occupiers".<sup>439</sup> Even today, hardline Copts still speak of themselves as the true

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<sup>430</sup> Chitham, 20 and Hasan 18-19.

<sup>431</sup> Hssan, 18.

<sup>432</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 126.

<sup>433</sup> Zaborowski, 6.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>436</sup> Mikhail, viii.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 19.



Egyptians.<sup>440</sup> In 2005, a DVD was released which consisted of a play preformed in a Coptic Church two years earlier. The play *I Once Was Blind but Now I See*, tells the story of a man who is convinced to become a Muslim in return for money and a wife, only to face death when he returns to Christianity.<sup>441</sup> Not surprisingly, the play almost identically mirrors the plot of 13<sup>th</sup> Century story of John of Phaijoit.

Even the use of the term “Copt” has become highly politicized, as Muslims often believe that the word, when applied solely to Christians, implies that they are more Egyptian than any other group.<sup>442</sup> While more moderate Copts and Muslims argue that all people within the country are equally Egyptian,<sup>443</sup> notions of exceptionalism do still exist. Given that the state is dominated by Muslims, these philosophies argue energy would be better spent on more important Christian pursuits outside Egypt’s political mainstream.

The beliefs outlined above form the foundation of Coptic communal solidarity. This identity stresses a historical mindset of sacrifice and exceptionalism, while encouraging believers that material power is not as important as spiritual growth. In the modern context, this translates into a community which is more pre-occupied with religious endeavours than political ones. Discussion will now move however, from this examination of ideologies to a focus on how the Coptic Orthodox Church was able to assume a hegemonic role over the community.

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<sup>440</sup> Sameh Fawzy, interview.

<sup>441</sup> Robin Moger and John Ehab, “All Over a Play,” *Cairo Magazine*, Issue 29, Oct 27- Nov 2 2005.

<sup>442</sup> Informal Interview with Ehab Salem, human rights activist. (Cairo, Egypt, 8 September 2005).

<sup>443</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 22 and Karim al-Gawhary “Copts in the ‘Egyptian Fabric’,” *Middle East Report* No. 200 (July-September, 1996), 21.

### *Church Controls Over the Coptic Community*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Orthodox Coptic Church was the target of increasing criticism from various Christian groups in Egypt. One of the most outspoken critics were evangelist Christians newly arrived from Europe who claimed the Orthodox clergy was hopelessly corrupt.<sup>444</sup> Secular Coptic Christians were also greatly concerned about the lack of transparency within the Church, and pushed to have greater control over the community's wealth. To that end, despite strong protest from the clergy, a council of layman were formed in 1874 and was named the *Maglis al-Milli*. The council's role was controversial but its secular members were committed to having a say over Coptic national affairs.<sup>445</sup> Until this time, these matters were handled by the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church, the highest ecclesiastical body within the clergy.<sup>446</sup> While the Church had been attempting to increase its powers over all Christian judicial matters,<sup>447</sup> the *Maglis* sought to limit their influence to religious considerations only.<sup>448</sup> One of the key controversies between the *Maglis* and the Synod was over which would control monastic endowments or *waqf*.<sup>449</sup> According to secular Copts, the clergy was mismanaging the funds to the detriment of the community. One example they used to highlight this was the monastery at Deir al-Muharraq, which was in need of serious renovations despite the fact that it produced a massive eighty-seven percent annual net-profit.<sup>450</sup> The *Maglis* called for a special council to be formed to handle all Coptic endowments. This council would be elected by the *Maglis* and approved by the Patriarch. The Patriarch and the

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<sup>444</sup> Carter, 26.

<sup>445</sup> Nisan 139.

<sup>446</sup> Meinardus, 9.

<sup>447</sup> Muhammad Afifi, "The State and the Church in Nineteenth Century Egypt," *Die Welt des Islams* Vol. 39, No. 3 (November 1999): 280.

<sup>448</sup> Hasan, 58.

<sup>449</sup> Carter, 28.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 42.

synod did not back down from the challenge however, and spared no effort in resisting any encroachment of its powers.<sup>451</sup> Other later disputes arose during the following decades when the *Maglis* attempted to influence who was elected as patriarch of the Church.<sup>452</sup>

For the most part however, Copts outside of the upper class gave their loyalty to the clergy.<sup>453</sup> This is supported by British reports during the early twentieth century which argued that Copts outside of Cairo largely did not have the same political ideologies as the elite. The British went further to say that attempts by secular Copts to mobilize (specifically during the 1911 conference in Asyut), represented the will of upper-class Copts only (about 12,000 out of 700,000 Christians in Egypt).<sup>454</sup> Although these conclusions were criticized by Coptic intellectuals who believed British findings to be superficial,<sup>455</sup> the role of the Church would increase drastically after the country's elite were weakened under the presidency of Gamal Abdul Nasser.

Moreover, the upper class of the Coptic community spurned most of the ideologies discussed during this chapter as superstition.<sup>456</sup> According to S.S. Hasan, the Coptic elite had "no notion of indigenous culture, it is a neo-colonial identity with international flavours".<sup>457</sup> It was this cultural dichotomy which encouraged much of the tension between Coptic elite and the clergy during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The political challenge to the Coptic Church by Christian upper class would be ended however, during the policies of the 1952 Revolution. The victory of the Free Officer's

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 29, 34-36.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>454</sup> Mikhail, 21, 36.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>456</sup> Hasan, 5.

<sup>457</sup> Hasan, 5.

Movement over the monarchy led to aggressive economic reforms that would have a devastating effect on all of Egypt's wealthy elite. In 1952, laws were promulgated limiting land ownership to a maximum of two - three hundred *feddans* (in 1961, this was again reduced to a maximum of one hundred *feddans*).<sup>458</sup> The remaining lands, as well as over 15,000 foreign businesses, were nationalized, including British and French companies which controlled the Suez Canal.<sup>459</sup> Landowners were broken as Nasser moved Egypt to a strict command economy.<sup>460</sup> The economic policies of the Revolution would severely strike at the Coptic elite, as the community lost seventy-five percent of its wealth, forcing the closure of schools and other social institutions.<sup>461</sup> Even the Church was targeted, with real-estate and *waqfs* (endowments) being nationalized.<sup>462</sup> In response, thousands of Copts emigrated to Europe and North America in order to protect their wealth.<sup>463</sup>

The damage to the Coptic elite was not only economic, but political as well. Despite their involvement with politics during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christians played almost no part in the Free Officers Movement which overthrew the monarchy and would not share in power afterwards.<sup>464</sup> Christian representation in parliament dropped to less than one percent,<sup>465</sup> as the community was systematically removed from the diplomatic service, education and economic ministries.<sup>466</sup> The collapse of the upper class

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<sup>458</sup> Vatikiotis, 392.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 389, 392.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>461</sup> Shatzmiller, 26.

<sup>462</sup> Cannuyer, 103.

<sup>463</sup> Solihin, 13.

<sup>464</sup> Nisan, 144.

<sup>465</sup> Shatzmiller, 26.

<sup>466</sup> Nisan, 145.

left the Coptic middle class as the dominate members of the community. Unlike the elite, these Christians were much more religious, and much closer to the clergy.<sup>467</sup>

Nasser's reforms did not purposefully target the Coptic elite more than their Muslim counterparts. In order to set up authoritarian control however, all competitors outside of the Free Officer's Movement needed to be suppressed. That said, many of Nasser's policies actually helped the Coptic Church, especially the massive effort to undermine Islamists groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>468</sup> Nasser even allowed the Church to build a massive cathedral in Cairo during the 1960s, in order to maintain Coptic goodwill.<sup>469</sup> Nasser did try to undermine some Coptic groups, outlawing one radical movement, the *al-Ummah al-Qibtiyyah*, an organization with almost 100,000 members.<sup>470</sup> He also passed a law dissolving the *Maglis al-Milli* in 1962.<sup>471</sup> Nasser's rhetoric would make it clear that his policies were not designed to persecute Copts, but to create a structure of authoritarianism. Negative remarks would target only what he saw to be Coptic fanatics who were "obsessed" with being a minority.<sup>472</sup>

The hegemony of the Orthodox Church, as briefly mentioned above, was also challenged by foreign Christian denominations. When foreign Christian missionaries entered the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they expected the Orthodox Church to be their natural ally.<sup>473</sup> Contrary to their expectations, the Coptic Church vehemently resisted Western missionaries, especially those from the Catholic Church.<sup>474</sup> These efforts have largely been successful, as statistics demonstrate ninety to ninety-five

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<sup>467</sup> Hasan, 58.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>470</sup> Solihin, 17.

<sup>471</sup> Meinardus, 74.

<sup>472</sup> Wakin, 69.

<sup>473</sup> Solihin, 47.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 31, 33.

percent of Egyptian Christians remain in the Orthodox Church.<sup>475</sup> Even Copts that have converted to other Christian sects maintain a link with the Orthodox clergy, attending festivals and even choosing to get married within their traditional Church.<sup>476</sup>

Now that evidence has been presented to demonstrate the potential of Church hegemony over the Coptic Christian community, the remainder of this chapter will focus on how hegemony was obtained. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Orthodox Church itself was undergoing calls from within to reform. Amongst the clergy, pressure rose to remove the stagnate “old guard”.<sup>477</sup> Efforts began slowly, as Pope Kyrillos IV (1854-1866) began to push for changes to the liturgy and communal infrastructure.<sup>478</sup> Many reforms would also be inspired by lay members of the community, such as Habib Girgis, who started the enormously successful Sunday School Movement in 1918.<sup>479</sup> This program, largely designed to counter protestant evangelism in the Coptic community worked to increase the importance of traditional Christian rituals with the Egyptian youth.<sup>480</sup> As the program grew in strength, it helped train Coptic Christians respond to religious polemics from various sources which criticized Orthodox Christian beliefs.<sup>481</sup> The program’s success was so great that by 1940, over 42,000 students were enrolled in religious classes.<sup>482</sup>

Renewal of Christian religious fervour can also be seen largely as a response to growing Islamist movements amongst Muslims.<sup>483</sup> Whereas the first such signs of

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<sup>475</sup> Hasan, 20 and Shatzmiller, 90.

<sup>476</sup> Wakin, 26.

<sup>477</sup> Hasan, 6.

<sup>478</sup> Cannuyer, 94.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>480</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 10.

<sup>481</sup> Shatzmiller, 41.

<sup>482</sup> Hasan, 75.

<sup>483</sup> Chitham, 108.

revival were seen within the secular community, momentum would quickly shift towards a clergy-dominated movement. During the mid-twentieth century, the Church had begun to consolidate its authority in the community.<sup>484</sup> Factions within the clergy began to push for the Orthodox Church to reorganize itself to meet modern challenges. Before reforms took root corruption was rampant, with many Coptic priests so poorly funded that they either sold “healing miracles” or concentrated on serving the rich members of the community at the expense of their congregation.<sup>485</sup> Under Pope Kyrillos VI (1959-1971), modernization efforts would end this and would accelerate restoration on various monasteries throughout Egypt.<sup>486</sup>

In order to be effective at resistance from other factions in the clergy, reformers cloaked their rhetoric within calls to return to the fundamentals of faith.<sup>487</sup> Activities and projects inspired by the reform movement made strong use of traditional images and ideologies to deflect criticism and successfully shield the movement from resistance.<sup>488</sup> According to S.S. Hasan, these reforms, though radical, were much more a case of revival than revolution.<sup>489</sup>

The current Pope of the Orthodox Church, Shenuda III, is also largely responsible for the clergy’s return to power.<sup>490</sup> A strong believer in Church-based social programs, the patriarch argued strongly during the 1970s for the Christian community to re-vamp and reorganize themselves.<sup>491</sup> Since then, the Church has helped fund schools, hospitals

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<sup>484</sup> Shatzmiller, 60.

<sup>485</sup> Hasan, 74.

<sup>486</sup> Cannuyer, 102.

<sup>487</sup> Hasan, 6.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>490</sup> Van Doorn-Harder and Vogt, 243.

<sup>491</sup> Solihin, 71.

and services to communities which the state could not afford to help.<sup>492</sup> Beyond just basic amenities however, several programs have been designed specifically to help assert Coptic loyalty towards the clergy. One program, the *Nota Ruhiyah* (spiritual notebook) movement would travel to villages throughout Egypt offering medical aid to Christians. While there, observers would catalogue for the Church the spiritual conditions of its residents.<sup>493</sup> Another program, *Bayt al-Khilwah* (house of retreat) was created to allow teens to experience the monastic lifestyle of the clergy. This experience leaves many teens with a higher respect and connection with the monasteries and even convinces some to later join the monastery as adults.<sup>494</sup> Student groups like *Usar Jamiyah Qibtiyyah* have also been organized mainly to help Christians defend against campus Islamists groups.<sup>495</sup> The clergy even has an official position, the Bishop of Youth, whose task it is to integrate youth within the “clerical space”.<sup>496</sup>

By and large, these programs have been extremely successful, as the Coptic Christian community have increasingly turned to the Church since the 1952 Revolution. Turning inwards towards Christian social groups have given Copts a sphere where they can exercise control and are no longer the minority.<sup>497</sup> Although critics often argue that the Pope’s policies are placing a cocoon around his community,<sup>498</sup> increasing numbers of educated Coptic professions are turning to the clergy as a career,<sup>499</sup> and even secular social activities within the community are now largely preceded by prayers.<sup>500</sup> Even

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<sup>492</sup> Carter, 48.

<sup>493</sup> Hasan, 79.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>499</sup> Walkin, 13.

<sup>500</sup> Hasan, 213.



when President Sadat tried to re-vive the *Maglis al-Milli* to weaken the Church, the Council's secular members would no longer challenge the clergy and generally followed the instructions of the Patriarch.<sup>501</sup>

Reforms have also centralized the clergy under the papacy's authority. Traditionally, Coptic Bishops have always shown deep respect for the patriarch, often prostrating to him to demonstrate devotion.<sup>502</sup> Ceremony aside however, Shenuda has worked hard to end the semi-feudal arrangement of Egypt's dioceses, dividing districts in strategically in order to help him select his supporters as bishops.<sup>503</sup> The Patriarch has also successfully reconnected parishes in the diaspora with his central authority and has reintegrated them within the hierarchy of Coptic Church.<sup>504</sup> Challenges within the clergy still occur, such as a 2002 movement which saw a group of Christians claim that the Holy Spirit declared they were to be the leaders of the Orthodox Church.<sup>505</sup> Another challenge came from Bishop Maximus I, who declared he would now lead a new Church in Egypt in 2006.<sup>506</sup> Largely these challenges are not effective against the power of the papacy, as Pope Shenuda has demonstrated a willingness to excommunicate those that challenge his authority.

The impact of the Church's control and the dominance of traditional mentalities outlined earlier in this chapter led to a Coptic identity which pledges allegiance first to religion and only than to the Egyptian state.<sup>507</sup> A half-century of communal organization

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 124-127.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>505</sup> "Egyptian Church Dismisses 13 Clerics," *BBC News Online* 5 July 2002, accessed on 28 July 2006; available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/2100001.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2100001.stm).

<sup>506</sup> "Egyptians Sue New Church Leader," *BBC News Online* 4 July 2006, accessed on 28 July 2006; available from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/5145988.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5145988.stm).

<sup>507</sup> Shatzmiller, 34.

has left the Church in control of social services in return for the right to be a spokesperson for all Egyptian Christians.<sup>508</sup> Shenuda consistently encourages Copts to focus on the creation of a separate Christian sphere under Church control.<sup>509</sup> Commitment to the new Church means a withdrawal from mainstream Egyptian political activities.<sup>510</sup> This has been extremely detrimental to Coptic political participation in Egypt, and has given the Pope the capability to negotiate a clientelist relationship with President Mubarak.

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<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>509</sup> Hasan, 99.

<sup>510</sup> Shatzmiller, 76.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE CLIENTELIST RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

The previous chapters have discussed questions of theory, explored elements of the Egyptian political landscape and the dynamics of Coptic religious sphere. During the last chapter, it was demonstrated that the Coptic Orthodox Church has set itself up as the hegemonic contact point between the Christian community and the Egyptian state. In this chapter, the nature of this relationship will be explored and described.

In Chapter Two, the ideal modern clientelist system was described as a progression where regional brokers had a declining share of power within the system. As the state's bureaucratic power solidified, patron politicians could increasingly connect with their clients directly. Chapter Five has demonstrated that within the context of the Christian-State relationship, this is not the case. The institution of the Coptic Orthodox Church stands in between regime and the possibility of forming a Christian client base. Does the Church therefore represent a broker as demonstrated in figure 6.1?

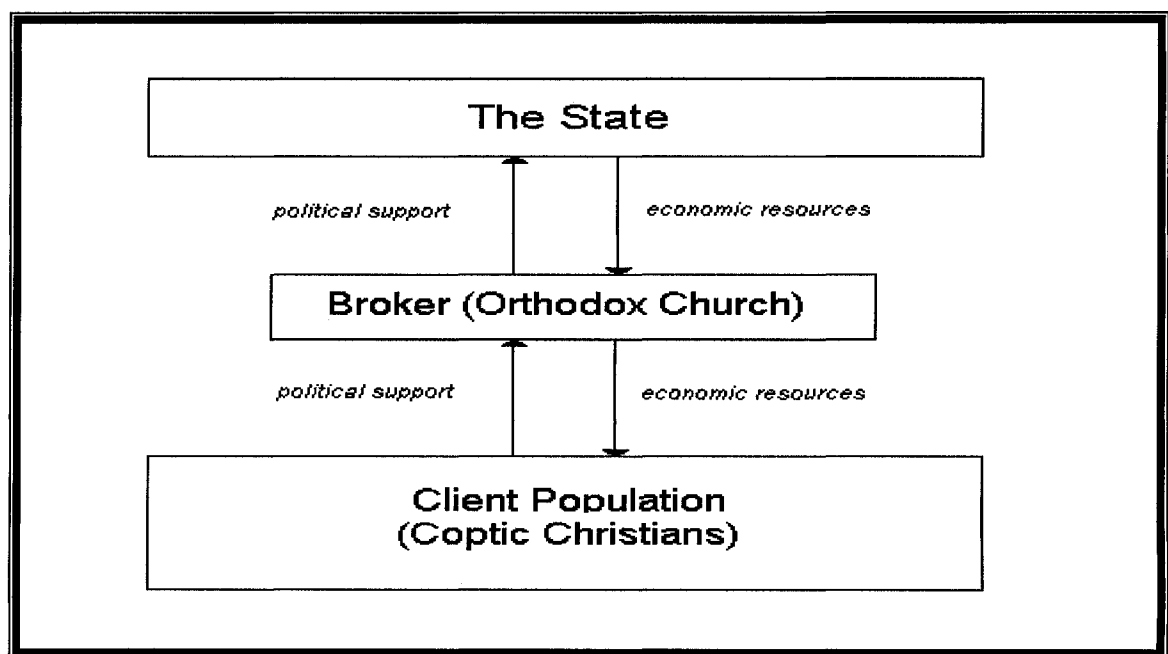


Figure 6.1: Model of the Church as a Clientelist Broker

There are several problems with the above model. First, the last chapter has demonstrated that the Church itself provides social programs for Coptic Christians without the help of the state. Rather than a simple transmission of the patron state's resources directly to the client, these programs appear to originate within the Orthodox Church itself. Moreover, the Church was able to provide these resources under state pressure during President Sadat. The state seemingly has no direct control over these resources and does not control the loyalty of the client. In the words of S.S. Hasan, the Christian religious space had become entirely a political counter-space within Egypt.<sup>511</sup> The following paragraphs will therefore explore the possibility of a more complex model while examining the interactions between the Coptic Christian religious sphere and the state.

The lack of state control over the Church's sphere of influence is strongly demonstrated during the presidency of Anwar Sadat, who routinely attacked Pope Shenuda on the grounds of trying to form a state within a state.<sup>512</sup> Sadat's arguments were most likely sincere, as he believed the Christian community was setting up an institutional autonomy that threatened national unity.<sup>513</sup> Shenuda's activities were highly politicized, with his bible study meetings more often than not resembling large Christian rallies. In reality, the autonomy of the Christian sphere was not calling for the violent creation of separate state. It did however, threaten the systemic authoritarian patron-client described in Chapter Three, as Shenuda pressured the Coptic Christian community to not cooperate with the state under Sadat.<sup>514</sup> Not surprisingly, the threat of one group

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<sup>511</sup> Hasan, 262.

<sup>512</sup> Solihin, 82.

<sup>513</sup> Van-Doorn Harder and Vogt, 249.

<sup>514</sup> Nisan, 150.

breaking away from the regime's system of control would contribute greatly to the destabilization of authoritarianism within the state, making it essential for Sadat to keep it from succeeding. So significant was the growing power of the Church that it led directly to Shenuda's arrest under Presidential decree 439 of 1981.<sup>515</sup> According to John Watson, Shenuda had "dabbled his hands in politics and burnt his fingers".<sup>516</sup> There is a truth to this statement, as Sadat's actions strongly demonstrated that the Church was still vulnerable to the regime's power. Indicted in the Court of Values, Shenuda faced charges of endangering national unity and peace, provoking hatred of the government, giving the Church "political overtones" and inciting conflict by ordering bishops to coerce and manipulate the government.<sup>517</sup> Only the controversy over carrying out a case against the Pope's sacred position prevented Shenuda from being tried.<sup>518</sup> This still did not protect the Coptic Patriarch completely however, as Sadat used his position to appoint five of Shenuda's opponents to run the Church while the patriarch was under house arrest. During their tenure, the Church would no longer engage in the politicized activities that were characteristic of Shenuda's rule.<sup>519</sup>

The transition to the Mubarak presidency however, would symbolize a dramatic shift for the Coptic Patriarch. The first indications of this shift occurred during a trip by President Mubarak to the White House which was to be disrupted by Coptic Christians within the diaspora who demanded the release of Shenuda. Personally appealing to his followers while under house arrest, Shenuda commanded Copts to "welcome the new

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<sup>515</sup> Van-Doorn Harder and Vogt, 249.

<sup>516</sup> Watson, 115.

<sup>517</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim, The Copts of Egypt (London: Minority Rights Group, 1996.), 20.

<sup>518</sup> Watson, 115.

<sup>519</sup> Hasan, 110-111.

President in love and submission...”<sup>520</sup> Later in 1983, Shenuda would write several letters to Mubarak declaring confidence in his work for national unity.<sup>521</sup> Eventually it was decided by the ruling party to release Shenuda in 1985, provided the patriarch abided by several key limits. These included Shenuda avoided making political statements, regularly returned to the desert to spend time in the monastery, avoided Cairo on Fridays and limited appearances in Alexandria. The three latter conditions were in response to threats against the Patriarch’s life but still represented key restrictions on his activities.<sup>522</sup> During his first service after being released from confinement, Shenuda described the liturgy as “a wonderful meeting of Love, arranged for you by our President, Hosni Mubarak.”<sup>523</sup>

During the Mubarak era, Shenuda has been “at peace” with the ruling party, at all times being extremely cordial with the President and constantly preaching tolerance for Muslims.<sup>524</sup> The nature of this transition is quite startling, considering Shenuda’s controversial personality. Even before becoming Pope, Shenuda had to be restrained as a bishop from confrontational activities which had disturbed the patience of President Nasser.<sup>525</sup> During the Mubarak period however, Shenuda consistently espoused a “turn the cheek” martyr philosophy to his followers.<sup>526</sup> Shenuda’s public activities were no longer political, but have focused entirely on ecclesiastical matters.<sup>527</sup> Despite the temptation to say that the Pope’s reversal is completely due to a feeling of vulnerability to the state, the actual foundation of policy shift is rooted in an understanding that

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<sup>520</sup> Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 20.

<sup>521</sup> Watson, 112.

<sup>522</sup> Watson, 116.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>524</sup> Shatzmiller 62.

<sup>525</sup> Hasan, 85.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>527</sup> Watson, 117.

President Mubarak would spend a significant amount of time undermining Islamists extremist groups which had constantly harassed Christians.<sup>528</sup> While its true violence against Christians has not ceased completely, as evident in Chapter Four, this simple agreement would form the base of the clientelist arrangement between Church and State. Mubarak, unlike Sadat, has also made no attempt to criticize Coptic autonomy, and has allowed the Church to independently control the Coptic Christian community. Moreover, Mubarak maintains contact only with the clergy, and does not meet with secular Christian political activists.<sup>529</sup>

Despite this, according to Gasser Abdel Razek from the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, there have been only superficial improvements in Christian rights under President Mubarak.<sup>530</sup> Many of these improvements have been religious concessions, such as the declaration that Coptic Christmas was to be a national holiday.<sup>531</sup> Other concessions include forcing Christians who want to convert to Islam to sit with Coptic priests in private to confirm that there is no outside pressure and to give the Church an opportunity to convince the person to not become an apostate.<sup>532</sup> There have also been concessions with regards to the official school curriculum, which now gives some attention to Coptic history.<sup>533</sup>

Perhaps the most effective concessions by the regime to the Coptic clergy come in the form of church permits. The current laws regarding the construction or repair of churches can be traced back to the 1856 Hamayouni Decree which abolished the *dhimmi*

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<sup>528</sup> Hasan, 115.

<sup>529</sup> George Ishak, Interview.

<sup>530</sup> Gasser Abdel Razek, interview.

<sup>531</sup> Gasser Abdel Razek, interview and Neumann.

<sup>532</sup> Ehab Salem, Interview.

<sup>533</sup> Neumann and al-Borai interview.

system in Egypt.<sup>534</sup> This act demands that permits for churches must come directly from the executive authority.<sup>535</sup> In 1934 this law was strengthened by the Interior Ministry, which added several conditions for building churches. These conditions insisted that permits required a report included which answered the following questions: Was the land empty or agricultural? Was the person who owned the land presenting the request? What was the distance to the nearest mosque? Is it near a Christian or Muslim settlement? Do nearby Muslims object? Does the head of the denomination approve of this request? Is there a church of the same denomination already in the town and what is the Christian population of the area? Finally, was the proposed church near government resources and if so, does it have the proper approval from the relevant ministry?<sup>536</sup> Even after the relevant answers were collected, permits were difficult to obtain. In fact, during the period between 1981 and 1990, only ten permits for church construction and twenty-six for church repairs were issued.<sup>537</sup> Permits are not necessarily rejected, but are often delayed for years, even several decades.<sup>538</sup> Repairs need not be significant to be delayed, as some pending requests included permission to attach an awning to a church in Asyut, and even permission for another to knock down a wall within their own building.<sup>539</sup> Efforts are made more complicated by intolerant segments of Muslim communities who attempt to complicate the process as much as possible. Unlike churches, mosques can be built without any special permit.<sup>540</sup> In some instances, mosques were hastily constructed

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<sup>534</sup> Shatzmiller, 25.

<sup>535</sup> Negad al-Borai, The Guillotine and the Pit: Freedom of Expression in Egypt 2002-2003 (Cairo: Embassy of Switzerland, 2004), 22.

<sup>536</sup> Ibrahim, The Copts of Egypt, 11.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>538</sup> Ibrahim, The Copts of Egypt, 23 and Wakin, 68.

<sup>539</sup> Hasan, 209.

<sup>540</sup> al-Borai, The Guillotine and the Pit, 22.



next to land being approved for a church in order to raise complaints.<sup>541</sup> Obviously, given the frustrating environment, many Christians have proceeded with church construction without proper permits.<sup>542</sup> This tactic can be extremely dangerous however, as several churches built without permission have been struck by arsonists.<sup>543</sup>

The controversial nature of church construction therefore makes the approval of proper permits a very significant gesture which the ruling party has used to maintain a clientelist relationship with the clergy. Despite statements that the clergy is politically neutral, secular Coptic experts like George Ishak and Sameh Fawzy are convinced that they are steadfast in their support for the National Democratic Party.<sup>544</sup> According to Sameh Fawzy, there is a direct correlation to instances where the clergy has provided the ruling party with their support, and in return received the approval of church permits. This was particularly the case with the 2005 presidential elections, where the Church officially endorsed President Mubarak in return for the approval of permits.<sup>545</sup> Soon afterwards, the President made further concessions announcing a policy shift regarding church permits which allowed repairs to be made while awaiting approval. This is quite a significant gain, particularly when in addition to other recent decrees which stipulate that repairs now only needed approval from the regional governor, rather than from the President himself.<sup>546</sup>

Despite the implication that the Church plays a hegemonic role in the lives of all Coptic Christians, political activists do exist. Many work with secular human rights

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<sup>541</sup> Hssan, 210.

<sup>542</sup> Watson, 67.

<sup>543</sup> Van-Doorn Harder and Vogt, 249.

<sup>544</sup> George Ishak interview and Sameh Fawzy interview.

<sup>545</sup> Sameh Fawzy interview.

<sup>546</sup> "Church Building Regulations Eased," Human Rights Without Frontiers 19 December 2005 [online report]; accessed on 31 July 2006; available from [http://www.hrwf.net/html/2005PDF/Egypt\\_2005.pdf](http://www.hrwf.net/html/2005PDF/Egypt_2005.pdf).

groups within the country, because Christian NGOs focus almost entirely on development issues.<sup>547</sup> According to Ahmed Samih, Director of the Al-Andalus Center for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies, Egyptian human rights NGOs have to struggle to pull the youth away from Church programs in order to get them involved.<sup>548</sup> George Ishak, Director of the opposition movement *Kifaya* agrees, but states that this is difficult considering the state surrounds the youth at such an early age.<sup>549</sup> Pressure on Copts to join Church organizations is extremely pronounced, and people who refuse to get involved in Church programs are often ostracized and labelled in front of the community as individuals whose hearts are “closed” to their faith.<sup>550</sup> The clergy is also prepared to utilize its highest censure on secular Coptic Christians who are too vocal with their criticism of the Church or the government, threatening to excommunicate those who protest the system too vocally.<sup>551</sup>

The preceding paragraphs demonstrate a system which is much more complex than a simple patron-broker-client chain. The model in figure 6.1 simply does not demonstrate this level of autonomy which is present in the transactions between the clergy and the Coptic community, transactions which were able to maintain themselves despite the concerted efforts of President Sadat. What instead appears to develop is a vertical hierarchy of independent clientelist relationships in which the ruling party accepts the autonomous hegemony of the Church over the Coptic community in return for political support and endorsements. The nature of the relationship would therefore be more accurately illustrated in Figure 6.2:

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<sup>547</sup> Sameh Fawzy interview.

<sup>548</sup> Ahmed Samih, interview.

<sup>549</sup> George Ishak interview.

<sup>550</sup> Hasan, 187.

<sup>551</sup> Off the record.

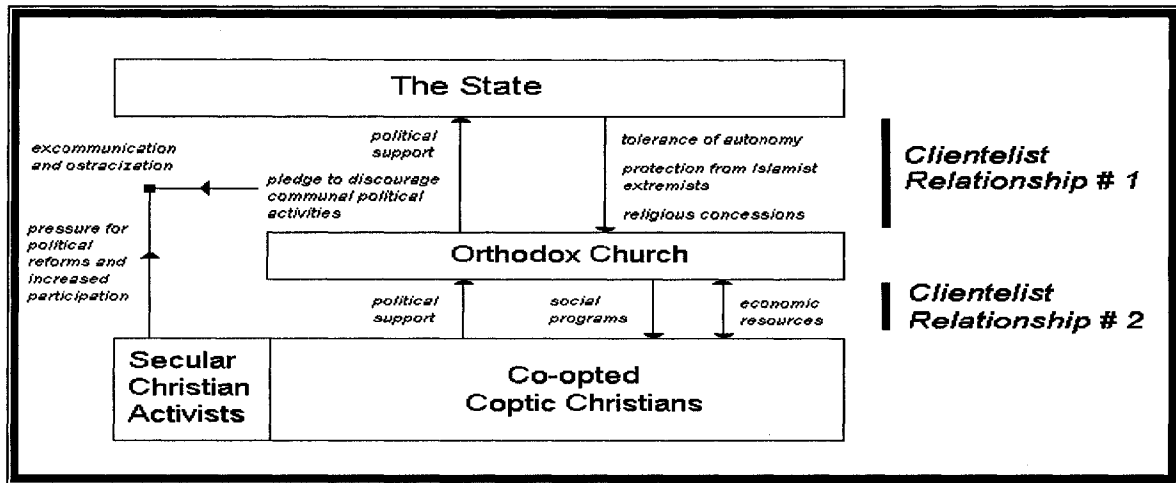


Figure 6.2: Clientelist model demonstrating vertical hierarchy of independent clientelist relationships

As the above model demonstrates, the clientelist relationship between the Coptic community and the Egyptian state is actually two independent but symbiotic transactions which together maintains the autonomy of the Coptic religious sphere (relationship two) while supporting the state (relationship one). Secular Christian activists have their activities frustrated by the Orthodox Church and therefore cannot work to help the community increase its political involvement. One seemingly glaring omission would be the lack of input of Islamic militants in the model. This is due to the argument presented in Chapter Four, which maintains that extremists expose a vulnerability within the Coptic community which pressure it to maintain the clientelist relationship with the state. The inclusion of the Islamists in the model is therefore relegated to state's moves to undermine them.

The lack of Coptic participation in Egyptian government is therefore in some sense voluntary. The co-opted community is willing to project an identity of political apathy in return for the social programs and opportunities provided by the Church, while the clergy itself is allowed to maintain this sphere because of their support for the ruling

NDP party. Low levels of Christian political involvement are therefore much more complicated than a simple case of minority persecution, as many would suggest. It is, in many ways, simply another facet of a phenomenon which frustrates all opposition groups in non-democratic governments, a phenomenon which is a key reason for authoritarianism throughout the Middle East.

## CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARDS THE HORIZON

The purpose of this study was to develop a more complex understanding of why Egyptian Christians are largely absent from the mainstream Egyptian political sphere. In pursuing this question, it has become increasingly clear that the apathetical political role of the Coptic Christian community is not simply a case of a persecuted minority as many assume. History demonstrates that the Coptic Christians have a legacy of political participation within the mainstream Egyptian political sphere during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and today are completely economically integrated with the Muslim majority. They have the resources to become involved if they so choose. In many ways, the choice to remain isolated is not based on the need to escape persecution but simply another manifestation of a systemic clientelist which maintains authoritarian systems throughout the Arab region.

Why would this particular relationship develop however? Why would the ruling party not attempt to enlist the Christian community in their efforts directly, rather than encouraging an indirect clientelist relationship? The key to this requires a step backwards to appreciate the wider context of modern Egyptian politics. Both the Coptic Christian community and the ruling party under President Mubarak have the same primary concern, specifically, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups in Egyptian politics. Faced with a possible religious government, the Coptic Church has forgone a democracy that could bring militant Islam to power.<sup>552</sup> This once again raises the question however of why the ruling party does not mobilize Christians and give them a prominent place within the party, as was the case with the *Wafd* party

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<sup>552</sup> Negad al-Borai, interview.

during the pre-revolutionary period. The simple answer is that, faced with an Islamist opposition, the ruling party cannot often risk nominating Christians for elections. Such a strategy would be open to exploitation by Islamist parties whose entire platform revolves around embracing Islam as a solution to modern problems. This creates a dynamic by which religious character is used in individual races, a factor often pragmatically manipulated by all parties.<sup>553</sup> By running Muslim candidates, the NDP undermines the religious discourse of Islamists at least to some extent.

Of course the motivations for creating such a carefully balanced clientelist system go beyond short term electoral considerations. Perhaps the best explanation of this relationship's strength and pervasiveness comes from the Director of the *Group for Democratic Development*, Negad al-Borai. The foundation of the problem in his opinion is that no group actually wants to solve it. The "Coptic card" is played by all sides without regard for Christian rights. The Church enjoys playing the "victim role" in order to demand concessions, while the ruling party considers the Copts a "hostage" to negotiate strategic concessions from the United States and Europe in Mubarak's never ending strategy to balance groups off one another. Even secular Copts within the international diaspora wish for the current situation to continue to maintain funding and support for their NGOs.<sup>554</sup>

Is everything a simple matter of pragmatic and calculated strategies with no concern for positive advancement? While practical considerations are significant, it is essential to remember that each actor within the system believes it is making a positive contribution for the people of Egypt. President Mubarak and the ruling party believe

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<sup>553</sup> George Ishak, interview.

<sup>554</sup> Negad al-Borai, interview.

their secular stance and centralized power base provides all Egyptians with a secure environment to prosper. The political landscape is simply too tenuous to risk losing to extremists. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists believe that the religion of Islam is an ideology which promotes freedom, equality and transparency, ideal values for anyone within the public trust. They believe their opposition to the ruling party is the key to liberal concessions and democratization within the government.<sup>555</sup> The Coptic Church, for its part, believes that it has the best ability of any Christian group to strengthen and maintain the Egyptian Christian identity through religious and social programs. Its organizational base and legitimacy allows the clergy to be the perfect contact point with the state to ensure Coptic rights. Secular Christians on the other hand argue that true strength cannot come from isolating the Coptic community in an autonomous social and political sphere. Direct representation in government will ensure that religious and political concerns are weighted without bias in the best interests of the community. According to Sameh Fawzy, Copts will only reap the rewards of political reform within Egypt if they are involved in the process of opening up the system. In his words, “you can’t be a good citizen in heaven without being one on Earth”.<sup>556</sup>

These differences of opinion strike a central reality of Egyptian politics today. A country that has so often been told by its leaders that there is only one legitimate course towards development and liberty is now arguably fragmenting despite the weight of the state’s political restrictions. With such a diversity of peoples, histories and identities, Egyptian plurality is beginning to manifest itself through every opportunity that appears. To many, this uncertainty is a frightening prospect, as every political group resists those

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<sup>555</sup> Essam al-Erian, interview.

<sup>556</sup> Sameh Fawzy, interview.

who feel there is a different path into the future. What is clear however, is that clientelist relationships, including those between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the ruling party are becoming increasingly challenged from all directions within the country. Whether they successfully resist, evolve or collapse however is uncertain.

In many ways, this study hopefully represents a first step towards greater understanding of an area defined by a distinct literature deficit. It does not however, provide a definitive last word on the subject. This study was blessed with access to many experts from a variety of perspectives that would answer direct questions with frankness and honesty. That said, resources were simply too limited to provide empirical evidence to scientifically measure many of the phenomena that were described during interviews. In reality, under current conditions within the country, it is difficult to believe any study could find direct evidence of an official clientelist agreement between the Church and state. First, such a transparency is not a characteristic of clientelist agreements in any system. As discussed earlier, these relationships are informal and lack any clear institutional evidence. Secondly, the transforming political nature of the Egyptian system makes discussion of sensitive topics difficult. Often those who are the most involved in policy making will offer researchers the least answers.

Despite these obstacles, future research does have enormous potential to test, modify and contribute to the conclusions of this study. Just as this thesis rests upon the invaluable research of scholars such as Negad al-Borai, S.S. Hasan, John Watson, B.L. Carter, Nelly Van Doorn-Harder and Otto F. Meinardus, other studies will hopefully be able to use the ideas presented here in order to shed more light onto the Coptic Christians of Egypt. One possibility can be for attention to be given to drawing statistical



relationships between church permits and important political events as well as examining the activities and statements of Coptic clergy in response to acts of extremist violence during the Sadat and Mubarak period. In fact, the oft-mentioned research deficiency represents a practically limitless assortment of options which future studies can explore.

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